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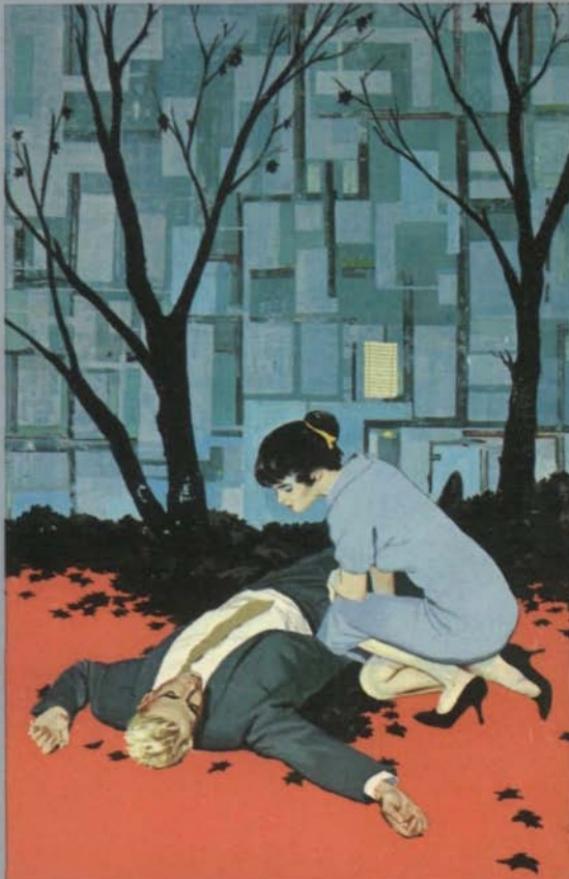


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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUG., 1977
VOL. 41, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE STOLEN JEWELS CAPER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When a man who looks like Mike Shayne, a man who calls himself Mike Shayne, a man who flashes Mike Shayne's credentials, hits a Miami jeweler in a \$250,000 heist plus felonious assault, the real Mike Shayne is in big trouble. Not only must he run down his impersonator, he must keep the police off his back **2 to 54**

LEO MARGULIES	Founder	A NEW TRUE MAFIA FEATURE	
CYLVIA KLEINMAN	Publisher	WHO KILLED JOHNNY ROSELLI?	
SAM MERWIN JR.	Editor	DAVID MAZROFF	62
NANCY LOWE	Subscriptions	SIX NEW SHORT STORIES	
		IT MUST BE YOU, HARRY	
		ERNEST SAVAGE	55
		PURE ROTTEN	
		JOHN LUTZ	86
		DEATH IN A SMALL HOTEL	
		WILHELMINA RAISBECK	90
		COMINGOR	
		JAMES M. REASONER	102
		BAPTISM OF BLOOD	
		HERBERT HARRIS	118
		QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD	
		KATHLEEN HERSHLEY	123

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RUNNING DOWN A DOUBLE CAN BE A TRICKY
BUSINESS—ESPECIALLY IF HE ISN'T THERE!

THE STOLEN JEWELS CAPER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Being set up for the larceny frame was trouble enough for the detective. But when his fill-in secretary was murdered by a mysterious Shayne look-alike, the redhead decided two Shaynes were one too many to be tolerated.

THE BLACK CAR SLID quietly into a parking slot in front of a darkened storefront in downtown Miami, and a big redhead in open-collared sport shirt and rumpled linen coat stepped out. He checked the time on his wristwatch, then glanced at the small sign above the door of an establishment just ahead. It read J.P. HOBART, Jeweler.

It was one of those hot, steamy evenings in Miami. A

strong offshore wind was rattling loose signs, blowing scraps of paper and debris along the street. Telecasters and radio announcers had been sending out warnings all day of an incipient hurricane building ninety miles off the Cuban coast.

A clerk was drawing the protective iron grillwork across the jewelry store's large plate glass windows when the redhead walked up and turned to go inside.

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"Sorry, sir," the clerk intervened. He was a young, serious-faced man two years out of college and evidently glad to be working. "We're closed for the day."

The redhead gave him a crooked smile. "Mr. Hobart's expecting me," he said. He took out a card, handed it to the clerk.

The clerk's manner changed. "Oh, yes, Sir. Mr. Hobart is inside, waiting for you, Mr. Shayne."

He opened the door and the big redhead followed him into the store. All overhead lights had been switched off, leaving only the dimmer ones illuminating the show window displays. The jewelry cases had been emptied of all save the least valuable items, the more expensive jewelry having been safely stored inside the store's vault.

A clock chimed somewhere, ringing a melodious six-thirty. The redhead glanced at his wristwatch as he followed the clerk to a small office in the rear of the store. Hobart's jewelry shop was one of the most exclusive in Miami, frequented by the wealthy and the famous.

Jay Hobart, a tall, lean, dignified-looking man in his early fifties was checking over invoices when the clerk

knocked, then entered with the big redhead.

"Mr. Michael Shayne, Sir," the clerk announced.

Hobart looked relieved. "Mr. Shayne?" He motioned the redhead to a comfortable, leather-covered chair, dismissed the clerk.

"Thank you, Harold. You may leave now. Lock up before you go. I'll let myself and Mr. Shayne out later."

He waited until the young clerk had closed the office door behind him and the big redhead had settled himself in the chair before speaking again.

"I'm afraid I had almost given up on you, Mr. Shayne. I tried calling your office again, but no one answered."

The big redhead shrugged. "I was delayed. But I always keep my appointments, Mr. Hobart." He drew a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, said, "What is it you want of me?"

Hobart eyed the big detective thoughtfully. He saw a powerful looking man in his late thirties, a mass of unruly red hair, eyes either blue or blue-gray. He didn't know Miami's most famous private investigator by sight and he very much wanted to be sure.

He said, "May I see your credentials, Mr. Shayne?"

The man in the leather chair laid a cold stare on the jeweler.

"Are you questioning my identity, Mr. Hobart?"

Hobart wet his lips. "Not at all, not at all," he answered hastily. "But these days, with so much street crime..." He sighed. "If you don't mind, it would greatly ease my worries."

The redhead shrugged. He took out his wallet, slipped his private investigator's license out, laid it down in front of the jeweler.

"Will this do?" he asked.

Hobart took a pair of gold-rimmed glasses from his breast pocket, put them on, studied the redhead's credentials.

"I've heard of you, of course," he said. "You come highly recommended." He handed the credentials back to the man standing in front of his desk. "They seem to be in order, Mr. Shayne. I hope you don't mind, but these days one can't be too careful."

The redhead cut through the niceties. "Mr. Hobart," he said bluntly, "my time is valuable. I get two hundred dollars a day, plus expenses. Now, what is it you want of me?"

"I want you to conduct an investigation of one of my customers," Hobart replied. He paused, seemingly distressed at what he was going to reveal. "I want it carried out in the strictest privacy. No publicity, no word to the police, no direct

contact with the principals involved."

The redhead frowned. "If that's what you want." He held up a cigaret. "Do you mind?"

Hobart shook his head, pushed an ashtray closer to the redhead. He took his glasses off, pinched the bridge of his nose as the private investigator lighted up. He was quite obviously upset and searching for a way to begin.

"Some time ago, Mr. Henry Carstairs purchased a diamond necklace, a bracelet and a ring for his wife. It was a matched set, and very, very expensive. Of course I was pleased to have the honor of filling Mr. Carstairs' order. I understood it was to be an anniversary gift to his wife."

"Carstairs?" The big red-headed detective frowned. "The Bal Harbour Carstairs?"

Hobart nodded. "Mr. Carstairs made a fortune in whiskey, retired, remarried after his first wife died. A much younger woman..."

"Helen Carstairs." The redhead nodded. "She's been in a lot of the social columns lately."

"Quite so." Hobart nodded. He seemed extremely unhappy.

"What's the problem?" the redhead asked. "You're not asking me to check their credit rating, are you?"

Hobart did not share the red-

head's levity. "The set," he said, frowning, "was purchased just over a year ago. Yesterday Mrs. Carstairs brought it back for resetting."

Hobart took a white linen handkerchief from his pocket, began to mop his face. "Today I discovered there's been a terrible mistake."

The redhead butted his cigaret out in Hobart's ash-tray. "What kind of mistake?"

"An exceedingly expensive one, Mr. Shayne." The jeweler mopped his face again. "The set Mrs. Carstairs brought in is a fake. Good zircon, but hardly good enough to fool even an apprentice jeweler. Total value slightly, under two hundred dollars."

The redhead leaned forward in his chair. "Of course you called Mrs. Carstairs?"

"Yes. I assumed she had mistakenly brought me her paste substitutes. Many women who have expensive jewelry have such substitutes to wear to occasional functions. But Mrs. Carstairs insisted she had never bought substitutes, that the set she had returned to me was the one Mr. Carstairs had purchased for her, and..."

Hobart's face was grim. "She as much as called me a thief! She now wants her set back, and she's threatened to have the law called in if I do not re-

turn the real diamonds to her."

"And, of course, you do not have them?" There seemed to be a note of skepticism in the redhead's question.

Hobart looked aggrieved. "I assure you, Mr. Shayne, I would not have requested your services, if I did."

"You signed a receipt for the set?"

The jeweler nodded. "I had no reason to suspect the set was not genuine at the time, and I was quite busy..." He leaned back in his chair, composed himself. "As you can see, Mr. Shayne, this is a very delicate matter. The Carstairs are extremely wealthy and very influential. Antagonizing them would be poor business—"

"I understand," the redhead interrupted. "You want me to find out if Mrs. Carstairs is lying about not having paste substitutes, and why?"

Relief showed in Hobart's thin, patrician features. "Discreetly, of course, Mr. Shayne."

"How much is the real set worth?"

"A quarter of a million dollars," Hobart replied.

The redhead frowned. "I can understand your concern," he said. "May I see the items Mrs. Carstairs brought you?"

Hobart got to his feet. "I keep them in the vault, although, as I have said, they are quite val-

ueless." He crossed to the small safe built into the back of his office. "It's opened by a time lock, but there's a release—in case of emergency." He took out a long, slender probe, inserted it in a wall receptacle. "It also turns off the silent alarm."

He opened the vault, reached inside, took out a blue-velvet-lined jeweler's case. "These may look genuine to the untrained eye," he began, "but to a jeweler—"

The big redhead had pulled out a sap while Hobart worked the vault's combination lock. He crossed to Hobart in three quick strides, slammed it down across the jeweler's head.

Hobart went down in a heap, the case slipping from his hands. The redhead picked it up, opened it, cast a quick glance at the necklace, bracelet and ring nestling inside, then closed it, slipped the flat case inside his coat pocket.

He turned to the open vault, selected several items of jewelry, pocketed them. He left the vault door open, let the jeweler lie unconscious on the floor, as he slipped out of the darkened store, strolled to his car and drove off into the storm-brewing night.

II

MIKE SHAYNE WATCHED gusts of



rain batter the observation windows of the airport lounge. The waiting room was crowded with impatient travelers. The redhead glanced at his watch. Eight o'clock. His plane had been delayed nearly an hour now.

A voice came over the loudspeaker system: "Flight eighty-seven will be ready for

boarding within thirty minutes. All passengers please stand by..."

Another thirty-minute delay. Shayne fretted. That would put him in Chicago too late to call Rollie Henderson. And if the threatened hurricane veered this way...

Shayne picked up his carry-on suitcase, walked back to a bench, sat down, resigning himself to the added delay. He reached inside his pocket for a cigaret, pulled out a crumpled pack, found it empty... he was about to toss it into a litter container when two uniformed policemen came into the lounge. Shayne watched them, having nothing better to do. They looked nervous. Both were young rookies, probably not more than a year or even less on the force.

They were searching through the crowd for someone, Shayne thought. He flipped the empty pack into the container, went back to his seat.

A fat woman, warm, uncomfortable, angry, plopped down next to him. "We wait any longer, we'll never get out of here," she complained. "And I have a daughter waiting for me in Chicago."

The redhead shrugged. The woman was having a problem with her suitcase, trying to bring it up on the seat beside

her. "Here," Shayne said, "let me give you a hand—"

"A hard voice interrupted. "Shayne?"

The redhead looked up. The two officers were standing over him. They looked like Starsky and Hutch of the TV show, Shayne thought.

The redhead nodded. "I'm Shayne." He knew many of the cops on the Miami police force, but he did not know these two.

The sandy-haired officer with cold gray eyes drew his service revolver. He pointed toward the lounge wall nearby. "Over there, Shayne! Hands flat against the wall, legs spread wide!"

It was police procedure, straight out of the Academy. Mike was annoyed. "Just a minute—" he began.

"Against the wall, Shayne!"

Nothing like a nervous rookie cop to be dangerous, Shayne thought. The fat woman had dropped her suitcase and was edging away from him. Other people were watching.

Shayne shrugged, got to his feet. He walked to the wall, placed his palms against the surface, spread his legs.

The sandy-haired officer's companion came up, carrying Shayne's suitcase. He set it down, frisked the big redhead for weapons. Shayne wasn't carrying any.

He stepped back, said: "He's clean, Joe."

Mike Bogan to turn around. He was shoved back against the wall and cuffs snapped around his wrists, locking his hands behind his back. Then he was pulled around, shoved back against the wall.

The sandy-haired officer called Joe said, "This your luggage?" He pointed to the suitcase his companion had brought over.

The redhead nodded. He was fuming. "Just what in hell do you think you're doing?" he snarled.

The sandy-haired officer ignored him. He was still holding his revolver on Shayne, although the big redhead, with his hands cuffed behind him, was quite helpless.

"Search it," Joe told his companion.

The dark haired officer opened Shayne's suitcase, searched through shirts, underwear, shaving gear. He looked up, shook his head. "Not here," he said.

The sandy-haired officer frowned. An airport security guard was pushing through the crowd, coming toward them.

"Check with the loading officer," Joe said. "See if he checked any other baggage through."

The security guard came up

as Joe's companion moved away. He looked concerned. Anything he could do?

"Keep an eye on that crowd," the sandy-haired officer said. "He might have an accomplice." To Shayne, "Let's go!"

The angry redhead kept his mouth shut. He knew procedure. Asking questions would get him nowhere. But he sure was going to raise hell when he got to the police station.

He went down the escalator with Joe, out to a waiting patrol car. Joe's companion joined them a few minutes later.

"No other baggage," he reported. "At least he didn't check any."

They got inside the patrol car, Shayne riding in back. The doors were locked, a heavy steel-mesh screen separating him from the officers riding up front.

Shayne settled back, making the best of it.

It was a long drive from the airport. The rain was heavy now, pounding against the windshield, the wipers working overtime. Shayne peered out the side window as the patrol car finally turned into the almost empty parking lot of Memorial Hospital. They pulled up close to a side entrance and Shayne was hustled inside and up to the third floor in an elevator.

Will Gentry, in civilian clothes, was pacing the corridor, a cigar clamped between his teeth. With him was a plainclothes detective, a rough-hewn, square-jawed man the big redhead recognized—Lieutenant Judson, robbery detail.

Shayne's eyes flashed angrily as he was brought up before the Miami police chief.

"Picked him up at the airport," the sandy-haired rookie said. "He had a plane ticket to Chicago." He set Shayne's suitcase down. "This is all the luggage he was carrying, Sir. We searched it . . ."

"Without a warrant!" Shayne snapped. "Goddammit, Will—what's going on?"

Gentry ignored him for the moment.

"Take those cuffs off," he ordered.

The sandy-haired officer hesitated.

"Take them off," Gentry growled. "We'll be responsible for him."

"Yes, sir." Joe unlocked the handcuffs, stepped back as the irate redhead faced him, massaging his wrists.

Gentry dismissed the two young officers. "Make out your report, hand it in to me in the morning," he instructed.

He waited until they had departed before turning to

Shayne. "Sorry if you were inconvenienced, Mike," he growled. "But I don't like being called away from dinner, either."

Judson was opening the door of Room 303, whispering something to the nurse inside.

Gentry said: "Come inside, Mike."

Shayne followed him into the room. It was a private room, small but comfortable and expensive as hell. A curtain was drawn around the bed.

Shayne went with Gentry as the nurse pulled the curtain back. The patient was an older man Shayne didn't know. His head was bandaged. His eyes were closed. There were an oxygen tank and face mask nearby, but the patient seemed to be breathing easily.

"Just a few moments," the nurse warned.

Gentry nodded. He leaned over the bed, said: "Mr. Hobart . . ." He repeated it once more, raising his voice slightly.

Hobart opened his eyes.

Gentry pointed to Shayne. "Is this the man, Mr. Hobart?"

Hobart stared up at the big redhead. He was heavily sedated and it took a moment for his gaze to focus. Then he rolled his head, said, "Yes . . . that's the man who came into my store tonight . . . robbed me . . ." His

voice was barely above a whisper. "Said he was Mike Shayne...."

Shayne started to growl something, but Gentry headed him off. He pulled the redhead away from the bed as the nurse came up, drew the curtain around the patient again.

Judson was standing by the window, watching the rain drive across the street below. He turned as Gentry and Shayne came up.

"Sorry, Shayne," he said. "But we had to make an identification."

"I never laid eyes on that man before," Shayne growled. "Who is he?"

"Jay P. Hobart," Gentry answered. "Hobart's Jewelry."

"Someone calling himself Mike Shayne walked into his store around six-thirty," Judson said quietly, "cracked his skull, took more than a quarter million dollars worth of jewelry from his vault and left."

"That's what he told the officer who found him," Gentry explained. "Judson called me at home."

Shayne scowled. "You know damn well I didn't do it, Will!"

Gentry nodded. "But someone fitting your description, and with your credentials did." He chewed savagely on his soggy cigar butt. "I tried to call you at your hotel, but you weren't

in, so I put in a call to Lucy. She said she thought you had an appointment with someone in Chicago, and were leaving tonight. That's why I sent a patrol car to the airport to pick you up."

Shayne glanced toward the curtained-off bed. "He made a mistake, Will. I never went near his place tonight."

"I believe you," Will answered. "But whoever it was, he fooled Hobart."

"We've alerted all units," Judson added. "Road blocks across every major highway in and out of Miami. Men checking the docks, even the small airports." He turned back to the window. "Looks like we're in for a big blow, Shayne. Whoever he is, he won't get far. Not in this kind of weather."

Shayne turned to Gentry. "Am I free to go?"

Gentry nodded. "Just stay in town, Mike—Until this case is closed."

"I wasn't planning to leave," Shayne said grimly. "Not now."

Gentry scowled. "I know how you feel, Mike. But Judson's in charge. Keep in touch."

The redhead nodded. "I'll keep in touch. But I want a free hand on this, Will. No police interference, no tail...."

He laid a hard glance on Judson. "It's my reputation that's on the line. Someone

using my name, my credentials, is hiding out there somewhere. I'm going to find him, if I have to turn this town inside out to do it!"

III

MIKE SHAYNE TOOK a cab from the hospital to his motel on the north bank of the Miami river. He had left his Buick in the hotel garage, expecting to be in Chicago for at least two weeks, and he hadn't wanted to leave it parked that long at the airport.

He was in grim mood as he entered the lobby, nodded curtly to the man behind the desk, who looked surprised to see him back, took the elevator up to his floor and went into his apartment. He tossed his suitcase on the couch, ran his fingers through unruly red hair damp from fleeting exposure to the rainstorm lashing Miami. He was still boiling from the incident at the airport...he had been rousted by two rookie cops and, while he couldn't blame them, it still didn't sit well with the big private investigator.

He poured himself a generous shot of brandy, settled himself in his easy chair, dialed Lucy's apartment. Lucy had been out of the office for more than a week now, down with the flu—

type A or B or some variation. A new girl had been hired from a firm specializing in temporary office help to take Lucy's place.

After a few rings, a voice answered. It wasn't Lucy. It was her sister, Wilma, who had come down from upstate to stay with Lucy.

"Yes—who is it?" Wilma had a soft, gentle voice.

"Shayne."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Michael. Lucy's asleep."

"How is she?"

"Better—much better. But the doctor says she should stay home for another few days. She's quite weak. However," Wilma hesitated, then, "if it's important..."

"No, don't disturb her," Shayne cut in. "I'll call her in the morning. Take good care of her, Wilma."

He hung up, took a long swallow of his brandy. He was calmer now, able to think. Gentry said Hobart had made an appointment with him through Shayne's office. The girl who had replaced Lucy was thirtyish, auburn-haired, attractive but not too competent. She was a poor typist and didn't take shorthand.

Irma Something...Mike had forgotten her last name. But it was on her employment card file and Shayne could look it up

when he got to the office tomorrow.

If Hobart made an appointment to see him through her, she had not told him. Shayne had left the office early to change, pack his bag for the trip to Chicago.

He settled back, put in a call to the Blackstone in Chicago. The desk said Mr. Henderson was out. Did he want to leave a message?

Shayne thought it over, decided not to. Rollie Henderson was one of those bluff, hearty men who hated messages, preferring to get his information first hand.

"No," he said to the Blackstone clerk. "I'll call back in the morning."

He hung up, finished his brandy, then slipped out of his damp clothes, took a hot shower and went to bed. The wind was slamming rain against his windows when he wakened to a murky daylight spilling into his bedroom. Shayne dressed, made himself breakfast—toast and three scrambled eggs. He spiked his coffee with brandy and turned on the kitchen radio.

The dial was set at a news station and Shayne came in on a weather report—Miami was expected to be lashed by the trailing edge of hurricane Georgia as it headed inland,

but Cuba was receiving the brunt of the hundred-mile-an-hour winds.

Mike turned the dial and a smooth, controlled voice came on, reporting from the morning show on ABC.

"A prominent Bal Harbour jeweler was assaulted and robbed in his downtown store last night, just before closing. Mystery surrounds the robbery. Mr. Hobart refuses to talk to reporters on advice from his doctor, and the police are closemouthed about the affair, disclosing only the routine 'we are checking out all leads...'"

Shayne cut the radio off, finished his breakfast. It was too early to call Henderson in Chicago. He hesitated about disturbing Lucy, but she called instead.

"Michael?" It was good to hear her voice. "You called last night?"

"Yeah, Angel."

"Was it important?"

"Not really. Just wanted to know how you were."

Lucy wasn't fooled. "Something is bothering you, isn't it?"

He didn't want to alarm her. "Did you get a call from my new secretary yesterday?"

"No." He could sense Lucy's puzzlement. "Should I have?"

"From a Mr. Hobart then? Wanting an appointment?"

He heard Lucy call her sister,

but couldn't hear what went on between them. Then, "No," Lucy said, "the only call that came in here was from Chief Gentry, wanting to know where he could reach you."

Shayne frowned, plucked at his left earlobe. Either Hobart had fabricated the appointment with Shayne to the police, or—

"Michael, are you in trouble?" Lucy's voice was concerned.

"Always," Shayne replied. "Go back to bed. I'll tell you about it later."

He hung up before she could reply, stacked the frying pan, his breakfast dish and his coffee cup in the sink and slipped into an old trenchcoat he kept in his closet. It wouldn't be much protection from the rain, but he didn't expect to be prowling Miami's streets.

He took the elevator down to the underground garage, got behind the wheel of his Buick convertible, made sure the top was securely tied down, and drove to his office on Flagler street.

The rising wind and rain were making driving hazardous and traffic was being slowed to a crawl in some areas. Shayne parked the convertible and made a dash for the building lobby, the driving rain slashing his face in the process. He mopped his face with his hand-

kerchief as he took the elevator up to his office.

He moved to fit his key into the door, but found it unlocked. Irma was inside, going through his files. She heard him enter and straightened quickly, surprise flashing across her face.

"Mr.—Mr.—Shayne...?"

Shayne noticed that she was a good-looking woman in a rather hard, used way. The smile that came to her lips looked mirthless, a reflex, long practiced.

Shayne said, "You come to work early, Miss..." He paused, still not recalling her name.

"Leronde," the girl said. "Irma Leronde. And... if you don't mind, it's Ms. Leronde."

Christ—one of those! Mike thought. He nodded. "Please sit down, Ms. Leronde."

Irma settled herself in a chair, crossed her legs. She had good legs, strong shapely thighs, a dancer's legs.

"I'm sorry," she said primly, "but I wasn't expecting you, Mr. Shayne. You're supposed to be in Chicago."

"The flight was called off," the big redhead said. He glanced toward the window, rattling under the storm's battering. "I doubt if anything is taking off from the Miami airport today."

She chewed on her upper

lip—a nervous sign, he thought. "I decided to come to work early," she explained, "to beat the weather. It may be worse later."

Shayne sat on the edge of her desk, his tone casual. "Did you receive a call from a Mr. Hobart? A downtown jeweler?" He paused. "Some time yesterday afternoon?"

"Hobart?" Irma's reddish brows puckered. "I don't recall..." She reached for a pad on the desk. "I'll check my memo book."

Her fingers rifled through the pages. "No... no call from a Mr. Hobart, Mr. Shayne. There was a call from the airport, however, confirming your booking on Flight eighth-seven..."

Shayne frowned. Someone was lying. Was it Irma... or Hobart?

"Is there anything else, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne shook his head. "Thanks for coming in today." He started for his inner office, then turned. "Oh, there is something. Get me Rollie Henderson on the phone. He's staying at the Blackstone in Chicago."

He closed the door behind him, quickly settled behind his desk, opened a desk drawer with a key he carried with him. He made a quick adjustment on a small cassette recorder just as



Irma's voice came over the intercom on his desk. "Mr. Henderson on the line, Mr. Shayne."

A light was flashing on his multi-line desk phone. Shayne pressed a button, picked up the receiver as he simultaneously shut off the recorder.

"Rollie? Shayne. Sorry about last night. I couldn't make it."

Henderson's hearty voice said something about hearing about the Florida hurricane on the morning news. When could Mike come to Chicago?

Shayne said he'd have to let Henderson know later. Some

pressing business he couldn't leave had come up and embroiled him thoroughly.

He hung up, went into the outer office. Irma was gone. Her raincoat, which had been hanging on the stand by the door, was gone. Shayne had a strong feeling she wouldn't be coming back. Scowling, he went through her desk, but found nothing there of interest. However, her employment card file, listing her name, address and previous employment was gone.

Shayne put in a call to the QUICK & READY, explained that he had hired a girl from their listing. Irma Leronde. He'd like her address as she had not come in this morning.

He was given the information after a lengthy wait. "Irma Leronde," the nasal voice said. "Two-five-o North Cypress..."

The redhead jotted it down. He went back into his office for the recorder, then decided he'd better call Will Gentry first.

The police chief came on the line. "Yeah, Shayne?"

"Any luck?"

"Judson's down at Hobart's shop, checking for fingerprints. He's running a check on Hobart's clerk, too... a young fellow name of Harold Ingalls." Gentry's voice had a grim humor. "But we're in luck so far. Our man's bottled up in Miami somewhere. No way he

can get out—not with this storm blowing."

Mike said he wanted to speak with Hobart. Was it possible?

Gentry replied: "Hang on, Mike. I'll call the hospital."

Shayne idly ran a thumbnail across his jaw as he waited. Rain battered the building. Somewhere in the city, a jewel thief who looked like him was hiding out. A man who had stolen a quarter of a million in jewels, and now, for the moment, had nowhere to go.

Gentry's voice came back on the line. "Hobart's out of danger and resting comfortably. He can have visitors." The police chief's tone was surly. "I'll meet you there, Mike."

Shayne drove out to Memorial Hospital with the wind gusting against the heavy Buick. The big redhead kept a firm hand on the wheel. Palms lining the boulevard were bending dangerously before the strong wind... a dead frond tore loose and came sailing across the street and only Shayne's catlike reactions saved him from being hit.

The private investigator parked close to the main entrance of the hospital. Tucking the cassette recorder under his trenchcoat, he made a dash for the entrance and was almost blown off his feet as he fought the wind.

Inside, he was stopped at the front desk. Mr. Hobart already had a visitor. And his wife was expected soon.

Shayne was forced to wait until Gentry arrived. The police chief said it was official business and the desk nurse became flustered, tried to apologize.

Hobart was sitting up, talking with his clerk when they entered. Harold turned, stiffened as he saw Shayne.

Hobart seemed to resent the intrusion. He had identified Shayne as the man who had robbed him last night... why wasn't he in jail?

The big redhead's jaw jutted angrily. "You were in poor condition last night to make any kind of identification," he said grimly. "Take a good look now. Mr. Hobart!"

Hobart reached for his glass case on the bedside table, put his glasses on. He stared at Shayne, his lips tightening. "I'm... sure." He turned to his clerk. "This is the man you showed into my office, isn't he?"

Harold nodded slowly. "Looks like him. Red hair, same general build." He hesitated. "But his voice sounds different..." He looked at Gentry. "It was pretty dark when he drove up and..." He looked back to Hobart. "I... I'm really not sure, Mr. Hobart..."

"I am!" Hobart snapped. "I

don't know how you can deny it," he said to Shayne. "I called your office, made an appointment with you."

"Not with me," Shayne growled.

"Your secretary, then."

"She denies receiving a call from you," the redhead said grimly.

Hobart stiffened. "Are you implying I lied?"

"Someone is," Shayne snapped back.

Hobart turned his attention to Gentry. "The man who robbed me showed me his credentials... driver's license, private investigator."

"They could have been forgeries," Gentry cut in gruffly. "Look, Mr. Hobart—I've known Mike Shayne too long to believe he'd pull a stunt like that. In fact, it was I who recommended him to the other night at the Sawyer fund-raising cocktail party."

Hobart looked suddenly uncomfortable. "Yes, I seem to recall that." He turned his gaze back to the redhead. "But if it wasn't you, then who—?"

"That's what we have to find out," Shayne answered grimly. He slipped the cassette recorder out from under his coat, set it down at the foot of Hobart's bed. "You said you called my office yesterday afternoon and that my secretary made a five-

thirty appointment for me at your office?"

Hobart nodded.

"I want you to listen to this recording," Shayne instructed. "Is this the voice you heard over the phone?"

He set the tape rolling. Irma's voice came on, loud and clear: "Mr. Henderson on the line, Mr. Shayne..."

Mike cut the recorder off.

Hobart nodded. "Yes, that's the woman I talked to."

Shayne turned to Gentry. "My temporary secretary, Irma Leronde. She's been filling in for Lucy."

Gentry scowled. "I'll have her picked up for questioning."

Shayne shook his head. "No. If she's in with the man who robbed Mr. Hobart, it could tip him off."

Gentry ran his knuckles across his jaw. "Well, what do you suggest, Mike?"

"Let me handle it," the big redhead growled. "I've got a lot at stake here." He looked at Hobart. "I'd appreciate it if you would say nothing of this to the press?"

Hobart nodded, looked at Harold. The young clerk said quickly, "I'll keep my mouth shut, Mr. Shayne."

The redhead picked up his recorder. "I'm not trying to out-guess the police," he told Gentry. "I know Lieutenant Judson's

a good man. But as long as that imposter is not caught, I'm still a suspect in his book. Keep him off my back, Will!"

Gentry nodded. "Just don't do anything foolish," he warned.

IV

THE REDHEAD WAS still fuming as he tooled his big Buick up Miami Avenue and headed north. The wind was howling like a banshee, splattering rain against his windshield. It soaked through the aging canvas top of the convertible, began to leak inside.

Shayne found Irma's address to be an apartment building, three stories high, new within the last two or three years. There was an underground parking area, reserved for tenants. Shayne ignored the posted *tow away* warning and dipped down the ramp. There were a number of vacant slots and Shayne slipped the Buick into one of them.

An elevator took him up to the lobby, where a bank of mailboxes lined a wall. He checked through them, found that Irma Leronde lived in apartment 2C. Shayne turned down a hallway, found the door, knocked.

A dog barked instantly from inside... a rather large dog from the sound of him. A wom-

an's voice said, "*Quiet, Horatio,*" and the barking tailed off to a low rumble. Then the door opened on a chain and a white-haired, matronly woman with bright blue eyes looked out at him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But there's a rule against door-to-door salesmen—"

She started to closet the door. Horatio, a big German shepherd, was just behind her.

Shayne wedged his foot in the opening. "I'm Michael Shayne, Irma's employer. I'd like to see her."

The old woman's eyes showed quick apprehension. "Irma...?"

Shayne nodded. "Irma Leronde. I was given this address by her employment agency."

The old woman sighed. "Yes, of course. Come in, Mr. Shayne." She unhooked the chain, stepped back. Horatio took a step toward the redhead as he entered, growling. The woman hooked her fingers under his collar, holding him.

Shayne looked around. The apartment was quite new—a one-bedroom, kitchenette and living-room affair. But the furniture belonged to another time, an era of mahogany sofas doilies and knick-knacks.

Horatio growled again, strained toward Shayne. The woman apologized. "Horatio

doesn't like strangers." She led him into her bedroom, closed the door.

Shayne stood in the center of the small living room, his keen glance making an inventory of the surroundings. A gold-framed photo on the TV set caught his attention. He moved closer. It was a picture of a girl in a chorus line, her costume spangles and bangles and silk top hat. The face under the hat was young, smiling, hopeful. It was the face of the girl he had hired—Irma Leronde.

The old woman came up beside him. "My niece, Vicki," she said.

Shayne frowned, turned to her. "Vicki?"

"I'm Irma Leronde," the old woman said. She turned away, toward the kitchen. "Can I get you something, Mr. Shayne? Coffee, tea, hot chocolate?"

Shayne shook his head.

"You look puzzled," the woman said.

"I am," Shayne admitted. "Last week I put in a call for a temporary secretary. Your niece was sent to my office. She called herself Irma Leronde."

"Yes, I know." The woman set a small kettle on a burner. "I didn't think it would matter. Vicki needed a job, and she didn't have the right qualifications. But I do. I've been a working secretary for almost

forty years, until I retired a year ago." She smiled. "I've kept my name on file with the employment agency for temporary work, just to keep busy."

"Can you tell me where I can find your niece?" the redhead asked.

"She's staying at the Plaza Hotel. She's really an entertainer, you know... singing and dancing. But lately her bookings have been quite spotty. I try to help her out when I can."

Shayne nodded.

"She visits me from time to time," Irma went on. "Calls me at others. She's a nice girl, Mr. Shayne..."

"You did say the Plaza?" Shayne interjected. He knew the place—a shabby old brick downtown hotel, frequented by show-business people.

The old woman walked with him to the door. "Vicki needed the job." She apologized. "I didn't think it would do any harm."

Shayne shrugged.

"Why do you want to see her?"

"She left the office this morning and hasn't returned. If she's quit, I'd like to know. I will have to hire someone else."

"Oh, dear!" Irma said. "I'm sorry to hear that." She turned. "Let me call her at the hotel. It's such nasty weather outside.

No sense in you driving all the way down to the Plaza."

Shayne tried to think of an excuse to stop her, but couldn't. Irma picked up her phone, dialed. She waited quite some time before hanging up.

"She's not there," she said. "But Vicki may have gone to the Domino Club in Miami Beach. She mentioned they were looking for dancers for their new show and thought she had a chance of being hired."

Horatio was beginning to make a fuss at being locked up. Shayne exited gracefully.

The Plaza huddled against the storm, its ancient bricks rain-streaked, its tattered awning flapping violently over the entrance. Fifty years ago it had been one of Miami's grander hotels, before Miami Beach's high-rise hostelleries began luring the affluent away. Actors and actresses, agents, producers and various other show people from New York and Hollywood, Boston and Philadelphia had lodged here. Some of their autographed photos were still displayed in the lobby.

With the demise of the original owners, the hotel had been taken over by various people less concerned with service than in making a fast buck. Slowly, through the years, the old hotel had gone downhill, the neighborhood around it

grown shabby. It stood now on its original corner in downtown Miami, like a proud old has-been, waiting for one last good review before bowing out gracefully.

Shayne pulled up in front of the hotel, parked the convertible alongside the red-painted curbing, ignoring the *hotel guests only* unloading sign stenciled on it. He waited behind the wheel, his eye on his rearview mirror, until a car came into view. It slowed briefly, then picked up speed and went by him, turning right at the next corner.

Shayne had spotted it when he left Irma Leronde's apartment. An unmarked car, but he could smell police all over it. Someone had put a tail on him. He didn't think it was Will Gentry.

He slipped out of the Buick and bucked gusts of driving rain as he ran into the hotel. There was no one in the old, once-elegant lobby, no one at the desk. Old and new stage and night club posters decorated the wall. The Plaza still catered to people in show business, but most of its clients were down-and-outers or never-weres.

The old walls were thick enough to smother the sound of the storm raging outside. Shayne could hear someone

singing somewhere upstairs, a quavering contralto running through an old melody in tiresome repetition.

Shayne banged on the desk bell.

He waited with the prickly feeling someone was watching him. He banged on the bell again and this time a door to the side of the mail pigeonholes opened and a man came forward.

Shayne's eyebrows arched in faint disbelief. The desk clerk looked like an 1890s dandy, slicked-back brown hair, small waxed mustache, striped light-blue suit. A walking stick and a "skimmer" would have completed the picture. He was as big as Shayne, but there the resemblance ended. The big redhead almost expected the man to go into a buck-and-wing.

"Yes?" the desk clerk said. His voice didn't fit the ensemble. It was hard, cold, hostile.

"I'm looking for Vicki Leronde," Shayne answered.

The hotel man ran his cold gaze over the big redhead, then reached under the counter, came up holding a gun. A snub-nosed Police Special, .38 caliber.

"One hundred and twenty bucks, Hannahan! Pay up, then get to hell out of here!"

Shayne scowled. The man was serious.

"Easy with that gun, feller," he said. "You have a permit for it?"

"You know damn well I have!" the desk man snapped back. "Would you like me to call the police and verify it for you?"

Shayne's grin was cold. "Yeah—do that, mister."

The man looked less sure of himself. "What are you trying to pull, Hannrahan? And quit calling me mister. I'm Jack Rubion, as you damn well know."

The name piqued Shayne. "All right, Jack—I believe you. Just so happens I'm not Hannrahan."

The desk man looked him over carefully again. "Well, you sure fooled me. Big man with red hair..." He shrugged. "Who are you?"

"Mike Shayne, private detective," the redhead answered. "And I want to see Vicki Leronde."

"She's not in," Jack Rubion answered. "I saw her go out about an hour ago."

Shayne frowned. "You sure?"

Rubion nodded. "She asked me to call her a cab."

"Know where she went?"

The desk man shook his head. "Must have been important, though, for her to go out in this storm."

Shayne was disappointed.

The desk clerk was shaking his head. "You sure you're not Rusty Hannrahan?"

The big redhead eyed him. "Big man with red hair looked like me, eh?"

"Almost a dead ringer," Rubion nodded. "Except for your voice."

"He used to live here?"

The desk man suddenly grew cautious. "Just a minute, mister. How do I know you really are Mike Shayne?"

The redhead extracted his identification, let him have a look at it. It mollified Rubion.

"Not any more," he growled. "Hannrahan moved out about a week ago, owing a month's back rent."

"Did he know Vicki?"

"Sure—they knew each other. Pretty close, too." The desk man shrugged. "We try to run a fairly respectable place here, but...well, you know how actors and entertainers are."

"Hannrahan was an entertainer?"

"Sure talked like one," Rubion answered. "Bragged about off-Broadway shows he starred in. I didn't believe him, but he was smooth as glass. A ladies' man, if you know what I mean?"

Shayne slipped a twenty out of his wallet, laid it on the desk in front of Rubion. "I haven't been here. You haven't seen

me. You haven't heard of me. Do you understand?"

The desk man picked up the twenty. "If you say so, Mr. Shayne."

"There'll be another double sawbuck for you, if you call me immediately when Vicki comes back. Or if you see Hannrahan again."

He left his card with the desk clerk and went on out. Upstairs the quavering contralto was still going through the old melody.

V

THE DOMINO CLUB WAS in Miami Beach, just off Collins Avenue. It was one of the smaller night spots trying hard to compete with the big hotel lounges, and its entertainment was strictly second rate.

The causeway across Biscayne Bay was closed to traffic. Police were diverting cars to the bridge further down. Shayne turned his car radio to a weather report. The tail end of the hurricane was lashing across the Keys, and it was expected the gale force winds across Miami would begin easing by nightfall.

The Domino Club parking lot was empty, save for a red Cadillac parked in a far corner. Shayne stopped within a few feet of the side entrance and



made it inside without getting too wet.

It was a short hallway flanked by rest rooms, a couple of wall telephones. He emerged from this into a big dining room with a small stage. It was empty save for a maintenance man working a vacuum cleaner around the tables and stacked chairs. Shayne had to raise his voice above the whirring sound to make himself heard. The maintenance man nodded, pointed to a door on the far side of the small stage marked MANAGER.

The club manager was a tall, supercilious man with a cast in his left eye and a red carnation in his lapel. He fancied himself

a ladies' man, and he was in a position to enforce his attentions, wanted or not, on women who came to him for a job. He was interviewing two young girls, scantily dressed, as Shayne came in. The girls looked like twins, and any bartender would automatically have asked to check identification proving they were eighteen.

The manager looked displeased at the interruption. Would Shayne please wait outside? He'd be through in a few minutes.

The redhead didn't push it. He waited, looking over the empty dining room, wondering how many customers would brave the weather to get here tonight.

The girls left and Shayne went back inside. He showed the manager his credentials, said he was looking for a Vicki Leronde. A private matter, but extremely urgent. He understood Vicki had come for an interview here?

The manager scowled. "She had an appointment, but she didn't show up." He glanced at his watch. "Two o'clock." He shrugged. "It's almost four now."

"Did she call you?"

"No. I thought the weather might have held her up," the manager explained, "so I called

her hotel. But the desk clerk said she'd left."

Shayne asked if he could use the office phone. The manager shrugged, said sure. The redhead dialed the Plaza. Jack Rubion came on the line, his voice cold, controlled. No, Vicki had not returned. He would call Shayne as soon as she did.

Shayne thanked the Domino club manager and went out. He was tired, wet, uncomfortable—and frustrated. Vicki was the only lead he had to the jewel thief who had passed himself off as Mike Shayne. She had been working in his office, and had ample opportunity to know what he was doing. But the matter of his forged credentials...?

The redhead scratched his head. How could she have managed that?

Then he remembered the day last week when the air conditioner had broken down in the office. It had been a sweltering day and he had taken his coat off and draped it across the back of his chair and later gone out to pick up a pack of cigarettes across the street.

He remembered he had left his wallet in his inside coat pocket because the change he had in his pants pocket was not quite enough to pay for the smokes and he had promised the clerk he'd stop by later.

Vicki could easily have gotten hold of his wallet, had his licenses xeroxed on the office machine, returned them before he got back. A clever forger then could easily make up valid-looking copies.

He drove back over the bridge, bucking the strong wind that swept across the span. Whitecaps laced the Bay's angry gray waters. Small boats at anchor pitched and rolled dangerously.

The weather report from his car radio still insisted the main force of hurricane Georgia would pass Miami by. The big redhead hoped they were wrong. He wanted the man he was after bottled up in Miami a few days longer.

Back at his hotel, Shayne parked the Buick in its slot, eyed the water that had seeped through the overhead canvas and made a note to have the old top replaced. He took the elevator up to his apartment. He had not eaten since early morning and this helped make him grumpy. He shucked his trench coat, walked to the window, looked down.

The car that had followed him to the Plaza and then to the Domino Club had pulled up across the street. The redhead waited until one of the two men stepped out of the car and ducked into the drugstore, then

he went to the phone by his easy chair, dialed police headquarters, asked for Gentry.

He waited until the police chief came on the line, then, angrily: "Will, take your goddam tail off me!"

Gentry started to protest. "Cal Smithers," Shayne cut in savagely. "Burglary detail. Dammit, I thought you promised—"

Gentry interrupted, his voice rising with barely concealed irritation. "I didn't order a tail. I'll check with Judson, call them off. But you better play it straight with us, Mike. I'm putting my butt on the line for you on this one."

"Thanks, Will." The redhead's voice was dry. "If anything breaks, I'll let you know."

He started to hang up. Gentry stopped him. "Did Hobart get in touch with you?"

Shayne was surprised. "No. Why?"

"He's been trying to call you all afternoon. Sounded urgent. But don't try calling him at the hospital. He's gone home. I'll give you his number."

Shayne waited while Gentry looked it up. Why would the jeweler want to see him?

Gentry's voice interrupted his speculations. Shayne was not too surprised at Hobart's phone number. It was a Bal Harbour exchange.

He hung up and thought things over. Why the change of heart on Hobart's part? The jeweler had seemed bitterly sure Mike was the man who had robbed him. The big redhead plucked at his left earlobe, scowling as he tried to put this new development into focus. Had to be Hobart had been holding something back—something he had not told the police.

Shayne glanced at his watch. It was late afternoon, and outside the wind seemed to be picking up, instead of easing. He put water on the stove to boil, then put in a call to Hobart's residence. A woman answered. She said she was Mrs. Hobart and that Jay was expecting Shayne's call. She'd put him on.

Hobart's voice sounded quite strong. Also conciliatory. He wanted to see Mike at the earliest opportunity.

Shayne said he'd be right over.

The water was boiling when he hung up. Shayne made himself a cup of instant coffee, poured in a generous slug of brandy, grabbed himself a bologna and cheese sandwich. While he munched on this, he called the *Daily News*.

Carl Dirksen, city editor, answered. Tim Rourke was out on assignment. Shayne left a message for the ace reporter to

meet him for dinner at The Beef House.

VI

THE WIND SEEMED TO BE slackening as Mike Shayne drove back across Biscayne Bay and headed north along Collins Avenue. But strong gusts still buffeted the Buick, causing the heavy car to swerve at times. There were few cars on the road, and above Shayne the sky was leaden and ominous.

The heat was moderate for the time of year, but the humidity was way up, and the redhead turned on his air-conditioning unit, although he disliked using it. He was a Floridian, used to Miami's weather, and he'd rather drive with rolled-down windows and top back than close himself up in a refrigerated car.

Hobart lived in a modest home, as Bal Harbour homes went. The white stone driveway made a curve from the street to the portico in front of the wide door, then exited on the street.

Shayne parked the Buick under the portico and rang the doorbell. A Cuban refugee maid opened it for him and he followed her inside, where a tall, handsome woman with silver gray hair met him.

She excused the maid, said graciously, "Mr. Shayne?" And,

as he nodded, "I'm Lorri Hobart. This way, please."

She led the private detective into a combination library-study. "Jay," she announced to the man waiting in a deep-cushioned library chair, "Mr. Shayne is here."

Hobart turned. He still wore a light bandage around his head, but his eyes were clear. His wife said, "Can I get you something, Jay?"

The jeweler smiled, shook his head. "Nothing, Lorri. I'm fine. And I promise not to keep Mr. Shayne too long."

The woman left the room reluctantly.

"She fusses over me a lot," Hobart explained. Then, as though it explained it, "We've been married thirty-two years."

"You're a lucky man," Shayne said.

Hobart eased back in his chair. "There's brandy on the side table," he pointed out. "Will Gentry told me it was your special brand. Please make yourself comfortable. It's a nasty day outside, and I feel obligated to you for coming all the way out here in this weather."

Shayne walked to the side table. The Martell Label fine. He poured himself a drink, came back to Hobart, sat down across from him, cupping the brandy glass in his hands.

"You have something to tell me?" the big redhead asked.

Hobart nodded. "It won't take up much of your time. But first I feel I should apologize to you for the way I acted at the hospital."

"I understand," Shayne cut in. "Far as I'm concerned, it's a closed matter. What I'm interested in is apprehending the imposter."

Hobart clasped his long manicured hands across his waist. "I told the police I was robbed of more than a quarter of a million dollars of jewelry. That's not quite true, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne frowned, leaned forward. "You were robbed?"

"Oh, yes." He was silent for a long moment. "I also didn't tell the police why I had made an appointment with you—or thought I had."

"Withholding evidence is a criminal offense," Shayne pointed out.

Hobart bit his lip. "Perhaps. But no one has asked—at least not yet."

Shayne shrugged, drank some of his brandy. "Just why did you want to hire me, Mr. Hobart?"

Hobart studied the big redhead for a moment. "I have a client, Mr. Shayne—a very wealthy client. A Mrs. Henry Carstairs. You may have heard of her?"

Shayne nodded. "In Miami it's hard not to," he said.

"I wanted her investigated," Hobart went on. "It's a delicate matter and I didn't want the police in on it, or the press, of course. It would be bad for my business, no matter how it came out, you see."

Shayne rolled the brandy glass between his palms. "Why?"

"Because the jewels the thief stole were fake," Hobart replied. "Bad paste. Nonetheless I stand to be stuck with a \$250,000 loss."

Shayne sipped more of his brandy. "Go on," he said.

Hobart explained the situation. "You see, now that the fake set has been stolen, I have no way of proving that they were not genuine. I did sign a receipt for them when Mrs. Carstairs brought the set in. It was careless of me, of course, for not making an instant appraisal, but the Carstairs have been good customers, and I sold them the set in the first place."

"Have you heard from Mrs. Carstairs?" Shayne asked.

"Yes. Mrs. Carstairs called me this morning. The Carstairs have a large estate on the Beach, not too far from here. She said she was sorry to hear what had happened to me. But, of course, she demanded the return of her necklace, bracelet

and diamond ring, or full value payment if they were not recovered within fifteen days."

Shayne finished his brandy, set the glass down on the chair-side table. It did look as though Mrs. Carstairs had Hobart over a barrel. But why would a woman married to the Carstairs millions want to go to all that trouble for a mere \$250,000?

Hobart said, "I can absorb the loss—my insurance will pay for it. Not full coverage, of course, and my premiums next year would most likely triple. But I don't like being made a fool of, Mr. Shayne. I am an honest man, and I've built my reputation on it. I dislike terribly what has happened."

The redhead nodded. "And I dislike being made the goat for it, Mr. Hobart. I, too, have a reputation to conserve."

"I'll have Lorri make out a retainer for you," Hobart began. "Whatever you require, within reason."

"It's not necessary," Shayne cut him off. "My fee is two hundred dollars a day, plus expenses. We'll settle when I find the thief and recover whatever has been stolen. And, of course, find out what Mrs. Henry Carstairs had to do with it."

Hobart sighed. "You will be discreet, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne waved as he went

out. "Of course," he said. "Part of the job."

The drive back to Miami was against slackening winds and darkening skies. Shayne remembered he had asked Tim Rourke to join him for dinner and glanced at his watch as he swung onto Miami Boulevard and headed for his hotel. He figured he had just time enough to shower, change and make it to The Beef House.

He felt better after the shower and in dry clothes. Before leaving, he put in a call to the Plaza. He expected to hear Jack Rubion's cold voice, but a woman answered instead. No, she said in answer to his query, Jack had just gone off duty. She had just come on and she didn't know if Vicki Leronde was in. If Shayne would wait she'd ring her room.

Shayne waited impatiently. The woman came back on the line. There was no answer from Vicki's room. It was obvious she had not yet returned.

Shayne hung up and scowled at the ceiling. All at once he had the grim feeling Vicki would not be returning to the Plaza at all. Either she had fled Miami, or she was dead.

Shayne was thinking over what Hobart had told him as he drove out of the hotel garage, stopped at a gas station to fuel up and headed for The Beef



House. There was little doubt in his mind now that Vicki Leronde had been working with the jewel thief. Hannrahan? An actor-entertainer, he could have pulled it off. But what about Mrs. Carstairs? Where was the connection?

Could be she was an innocent victim who had somehow been duped into returning the fake diamond set to Hobart thinking them the real thing. Or else she was behind the clever scheme to con Hobart out of a quarter of a million dollars, while she retained the real gems.

It was the sort of puzzle the redhead relished solving. The key, of course, was finding the man who had taken on Shayne's identity for the job.

The storm seemed to be passing Miami by, the full brunt of it, anyway. Overhead the sky was clearing—stars shone in the open patches. Shayne knew

he would have to track the imposter down soon or else risk losing him altogether.

The Beef House loomed up ahead, its neon sign probing through the evening gloom. Usually Shayne parked in the lot behind the restaurant, but this time he spotted a parking space on the street and he eased the big Buick into it.

Metal newspaper racks lined the curb in front of the eating place. Shayne ignored the porno sheets, glanced at the Miami Daily News. An item caught his attention. A two column boxed item with a small type head which read: BODY OF NUDE WOMAN FOUND IN BISCAYNE BAY.

The redhead put a coin in the slot, took out a copy of the newspaper. He was reading the news bulletin as he strode into the restaurant.

There wasn't much to go on. A nude body had been found floating around the pier of an oil company by a maintenance man checking for wind damage to company installations. The body was that of a woman somewhere between twenty-five and thirty. Cause of death appeared to be by drowning, but a coroner's report still had to be made. Police were trying to establish identity through dental records, etc.

Shayne's big fist tightened on

the newspaper as he went in.

VII

TIM ROURKE WAS WAITING for Shayne in their favorite booth. The ace reporter looked thinner than usual, and pale. He was chain-smoking, a drink in front of him, as the big redhead slid into the seat across from him.

Tim glanced at the newspaper clutched in Shayne's big fist. "Read all about it in the *Daily News*," he said, pitching his voice high in newshawker style. "Read all about the latest political shennanigans, the hurricane battering the Keys, the love nest murders—"

Shayne slapped the newspaper down on the table, jabbed a forefinger down on the boxed bulletin. "What do you know about this, Tim?"

Rourke glanced at the item, shrugged. "Came in just in time to make the late edition." He looked up at Shayne. "Nothing more than what's in there."

"You cover it?"

"I wasn't at the pier when they found her," Rourke answered. "But I went down to the city morgue when they brought her in."

"You have a good look at her?"

The ace reporter nodded.

"She have reddish hair?"

Tim frowned. "Not like yours.

But there was a lot of red in it."

Shayne settled back, the look on his face piquing the reporter's curiosity. "You know who she was?"

"I think so," Shayne replied. In fact, he was quite sure now that it was Vicki Leronde.

Tim smelled a story. "What are you tangled up with now, Mike?" He leaned across the table, eyes glowing like a bloodhound on the trail. "And come to think of it, what are you doing in Miami. I seem to remember you had an appointment with someone in Chicago—"

Shayne cut him off as the waiter came to the table. He ordered his usual, a brandy with side branch water, and waited until the waiter left.

"What do you know about Mrs. Carstairs?" he asked grimly. "The Bal Harbour Carstairs."

"The whiskey heiress?" Tim scratched the tip of his thin nose. "Good looking woman, much too young for Henry Carstairs." He shrugged. "Only the usual things... charity work, society-column stuff. Our society editor could tell you more."

Shayne lowered his voice. "What I'm going to tell you is not for publication, Tim. I want your promise."

Tim nodded. "I'll sit on it," he agreed.

Shayne told him everything, from the beginning.

Tim whistled softly. "A jewel thief posing as Michael Shayne..." He frowned. "A quarter of a million dollars is no mean haul, Mike."

"That's not counting the value of the other items he took," Shayne growled. "Hobart didn't say, but my guess is that it was considerable."

The ace reporter butted out his cigaret. "I wondered why the police were so close-mouthed about what appeared to be a routine jewelry-store heist." The excitement had brought some color to Tim's face. "Pretty slick caper, if Mrs. Carstairs is behind it. Of course, there's always the possibility the thief was in on his own and just took what seemed most valuable out of Hobart's vault—"

"I don't think so," Mike Shayne cut him off. "Hobart had told him about the paste. He knew what he was taking well enough."

The waiter brought Shayne's brandy, and they ordered dinner. The redhead was hungry, and he went for the thick New York steak, salad and baked potato. Rourke ordered prime rib, well done.

"The whole thing was too

well planned," Shayne continued after the waiter left. "The imposter must have known Hobart had called my office for an appointment. He even knew I was due out of town for a couple of weeks. He went to a lot of trouble to make sure Hobart would identify me as the thief."

"My taking a flight to Chicago on the same night would seem an admission of guilt. Then, while the police were trying to track me down, he'd have little trouble quietly slipping out of town."

"But why would he run, if he knew what he stole was paste?" Tim questioned. "Doesn't make sense, Mike."

"It does, if he's waiting to be paid for the job," Shayne replied. "It's possible whoever hired him doesn't know he took other jewelry." A thought struck the redhead and he shook his head. "Don't know why he didn't clean out Hobart's vault, while he was at it—unless he was frightened off."

Tim finished his drink. "I'll check the newspaper morgue on Mrs. Carstairs. See what I can dig up. I seem to remember there was quite a story about her at the time when she married Carstairs. Helen Morgan, alias Candy Morgan, Las Vegas showgirl."

Shayne nodded. "While you're at it, see what you can find on an entertainer—name of Rusty Hannrahan. Probably a stage name."

The waiter returned with their dinners. Shayne pitched in with gusto, but Tim outdid him. The tapeworm-thin reporter went through his food like a swarm of locusts and was on his second cigaret before Shayne finished.

Shayne signed the check for both of them and left a sizeable tip for the waitress. They were on the way-out when the bartender said he had a call for Mike Shayne. Would he pick it up on the house phone by the bar?

It was from Judson. There was a body at the city morgue that wanted an identification. Would Shayne come over?

Shayne hung up, frowning. Judson's men had followed him most of the day. He suspected Judson had a pretty good idea who the girl on the slab was but wanted confirmation from the redhead.

He turned to Rourke. "Check on Helen Carstairs and Hannrahan for me," he repeated. "I'll see you in the morning."

It was after eight when Shayne turned into the city morgue parking lot and went inside. Lieutenant Judson was waiting for him with a slim

stranger he introduced as Terry Lambertson, working out of Homicide. Terry worked undercover.

He wore a full brown beard, long shaggy hair and had pale expressionless blue eyes which helped make his age undeterminable. He was wearing old blue jeans and an even older T shirt. Shayne could never get used to a cop looking like a drug-pushing hippie.

They went into the cooling room with the morgue attendant. The body was laid out on a marble-topped table, covered by a sheet. The attendant pulled the sheet back, exposing just the still, cold face.

Shayne nodded. It was his missing temporary secretary, Vicki Leronde.

Lambertson jotted this down in his small notebook. He did most of the questioning while Judson looked on.

"Any relatives, friends, family?"

"She has an aunt living at 250 North Cypress," Shayne answered. "I don't know of anyone else." He watched the attendant draw the sheet back over Vicki's face.

"How did she die? Drowning?"

Lambertson shrugged. "Coroner says she was strangled before being dropped into the water. Windpipe crushed.

Somebody with strong hands." His pale eyes flickered over Shayne. "Have any idea why anybody would want to wipe her out?"

Shayne shook his head. He wasn't ready to theorize for Lambertson. "She worked for me on a temporary basis," he explained. "My regular secretary has been out with the flu. I really don't know much about her." He shrugged. "I saw her briefly this morning."

Judson said: "But you have been trying to find her?"

The redhead turned to him. "Yes. I thought she might know something about the Hobart jewelry heist."

Lambertson closed his notebook. "Heard a lot about you, Shayne. Never met you." He ran his pale eyes over the private detective. "You're big."

His manner was deceptively polite. But he didn't fool Shayne. The man was judging him. A big man had strangled Vicki Leronde, and he fitted that much of the bill.

Judson walked with Shayne out of the cooling room. "Thanks for coming over," he said.

Mike Shayne paused, glanced back to the swinging doors. Judson answered his unspoken question. "Not my choice," he said, lowering his voice. "Lambertson's on special assignment

out of the Commissioner's office."

"A jewelry heist?" Shayne's tone was skeptical.

"No... homicide. There's been several bodies found floating in the Bay this month. The connection seems to be hard drugs and the Syndicate, and a private war between them." He shook his head. "Kind of complicates things for you, I know. I pulled my men back, but I can't do anything about Lambertson."

Shayne nodded.

Lambertson had come out of the cooling room and was watching him as the big redhead left.

VIII

IT HAD BEEN a long day. Mike Shayne left the city morgue, stopped by his Buick, looked up at the clearing sky. Stars glittered through rents in the cloud mass. A thin drizzle was falling, but the oppressive humidity was lightening a bit.

He slipped behind the wheel, looked across the parking lot, his thoughts turned inward, speculating. Helen Carstairs must have known what she was doing when she brought the fake set to Hobart and then tried to pass it off as the real thing. But he just couldn't go up to Mrs. Carstairs and accuse

her of this, not without immediately incurring a legal suit. Nor was it wise. Hobart, of course, was right. It was a delicate matter.

Shayne was certain Vicki had been involved. With Hannrahan? It shaped up that way. But why had Vicki been killed? The key, the big redhead felt, lay back at the Plaza.

Shayne swung the Buick out of the parking lot and headed for the old show-business hotel. He had not told Lambertson where Vicki was living, an oversight the undercover man could easily remedy when he contacted Vicki's aunt.

Shayne wanted to get there before Lambertson did.

He drove to the Plaza, parked, went inside. The rain had tailed off. Water dripped from eaves, gutters, ran down shiny wet streets.

There was no one in the old lobby, but a woman sat behind the desk, reading a paperback. She looked about thirty-five, a long, angular woman with chestnut hair already showing strands of gray. She wore very little makeup and was obviously not impressed by show people.

She looked up from her book as Shayne came to the desk. "Yes?" she said, eyeing him. She had level gray eyes and a precise inflexible voice.

"I'd like to talk to the hotel manager," Shayne said.

She looked at him for a long moment before replying. Shayne noted she was reading a Gothic novel.

"Jack Rubion's off duty," she replied. "I am the assistant manager." She nodded to the desk sign, which read *Angie Myford*.

Shayne took out his wallet, showed her his credentials. "I'm interested in one of your guests—a Vicki Leronde. She's a client of mine."

The woman manager shrugged. "You called earlier, didn't you?" Shayne nodded. "She hasn't come back yet."

"I know," the big redhead replied. "She won't be coming back." He took out a twenty, placed it on the desk in front of Angie Myford. "I just want to take a look around her room, before the police get here."

The woman manager shrugged. "You called earlier, didn't you?" Shayne nodded. "She hasn't come back yet."

The woman dropped her book, gaped at Shayne. "Oh, my God!" She reached behind her, took a key from a slot, handed it to Shayne. It was obvious the news had unnerved her.

"Three-o-six," she said mechanically.

Shayne swung away before Angie Myford recovered and



could change her mind. He took the creaky elevator up to the fourth floor, stepped out onto worn, rust-colored carpeting. Sprinkler heads in the ceiling had been added to conform to fire-regulations, but not much else had been done to spruce up the old hotel. The walls needed painting, and there was a musty smell in the corridor, redolent of old age.

He stopped before 306. The door was locked. Someone in the room directly across was scolding someone, probably a child, Shayne thought. It was a woman's voice, saying, "Naughty, naughty boy..."

The rest of the rooms on the

floor were either vacant or the tenants very quiet.

Shayne fitted the key in the lock. It was old-fashioned and the key rattled around before he could get it open. He stepped inside, caught a glimpse of bedroom curtains blowing in the breeze through an open window and a shadow moving out from behind the door from the corner of his eye.

Cat-quick reflexes saved him from a cracked skull. He twisted away from the door and the blow glanced off his head, sending him stumbling into the room, falling to his hands and knees.

The redhead rolled over, tried to get up. Through pain-blurred gaze he spotted a figure moving quickly toward the open window in the bedroom. There was a light burning somewhere, but not enough for the redhead to make out more than a vague outline of the fleeing intruder.

It seemed to take an eternity for Shayne to get to his feet. He lurched across the dark room, stumbled over something on the floor, went down to his hands and knees again. By time he got to the bedroom window the intruder was gone.

Shayne stared down on an old iron fire-escape zig-zagging down to the alley below. A drizzle wet his face. The curtains were wet to his touch, indicat-

ing that the window had been open for some time.

Nothing moved in the alley below. Rainspouts dripped in the stillness, the silence broken only by the occasional swish of a car passing on the street out of Shayne's view.

Shayne pulled back, sat down on the bed to quiet the nausea roiling in his stomach. He touched his head. There was a gash just above his right eye, but the bleeding was slight. He had been lucky that the blow had been a glancing one.

The queasiness in his stomach subsided, but the pain in his head increased. Shayne looked around, saw that the light was coming from the bathroom. Otherwise the bedroom was dark.

He got to his feet, closed the front door, found the light switch, snapped it on. His gaze was clearing, but he'd have a headache for a while.

The redhead made an inventory of Vicki's room. Her clothes were still hanging in the small closet, but they had been pawed through and one of them, a dress, lay crumpled with hanger on the closet-floor.

The bathroom light had been put on by the intruder either for indirect lighting of Vicki's bedroom, or forgotten when he got to searching through Vicki's bureau. A drawer lay on the

floor with personal items of Vicki's undergarments strewn around. This was what Shayne had stumbled over.

Vicki Leronde was dead. Whoever had come here tonight must have known that. Who was it? Hannrahan? What was he looking for?

Shayne snapped off the bathroom light, replaced the bureau drawer, looked around. Nothing else seemed to have been disturbed. He crossed to the window, closed it.

He looked around once more before going out. It was a large room, as hotel rooms went, with high ceiling and ornate molding. But it looked shabby now. Shayne was touched by it, by the fleeting speculation on the tenants, on those with hope and those without, who had stayed here, and passed on.

Shayne locked Vicki's door behind him. He was about to turn toward the elevator when the contralto he had heard before, started up again from inside the room across the hall. It was clearer now, and once it had been a good voice...

Shayne knocked on the door. Someone inside said, "Who is it... who is it?" It sounded like a bird. The contralto stopped.

After a moment the door opened and a fat woman looked out at him. Her body was encased in a flowered muu-muu

and her hair was a mass of blonde ringlets, but the dye job had been badly done. She looked at Shayne with a baby doll expression, but she was at least sixty, if she was a day.

"Yes?" she said coyly. "Can I help you, Big Boy?"

"I'm a friend of Vicki's," Shayne said. "I'd like—"

"Oh!" the fat woman cut in. "She's right across the hall—room 306."

"I know," Shayne said. "She isn't in."

"*She isn't in... she isn't in...*" a bird squawked from behind the woman.

She turned, said "Rasmus, keep quiet!" Looking back to Shayne she blinked her eyelashes at him as she ran a hand coyly through her hair. "Vicki's in," she said. "But sometimes she doesn't answer. She gets depressed sometimes, and doesn't want to see anybody."

"She's not in," Shayne repeated. "I just looked."

The baby face turned serious. "You sure?"

The big redhead nodded. "I came by this afternoon, but the manager said she'd gone out. I hoped she'd be back by now."

The fat woman frowned. "Come in," she said. "I don't like talking to people in the hallway."

Shayne stepped inside. It was

like stepping back fifty years. Old furniture, lampshades with bead fringes. A mynah bird in a cage on a stand. Several large wall posters showing a young raven-haired woman singing with head thrown back. *Mimi Latour*. Singing at Carnegie Hall.

The fat woman said, "That was me; quite a few years ago. More than I care to remember."

She seemed a different person now, as though the baby doll look and voice was a put-on for strangers.

"I thought I knew all Vicki's boyfriends," she said, "You must be a new one."

Shayne shrugged. "I was her employer." He took out his card, handed it to her.

Her hand trembled as she read it. "Mike Shayne, Private Investigator?"

She sank down into an old, overstuffed chair. "Vicki didn't go out today," she said quietly. "I would have known. Vicki never went out without telling me and leaving me her key."

Shayne frowned.

"She was superstitious," the fat woman said. "Like most show people."

"I'm sorry," Shayne said, "but Vicki did go out. And someone killed her."

The woman stared at him. "Vicki?"

The big redhead nodded. "Her

body was fished out of the Bay a few hours ago."

The fat woman took it hard. "She didn't go out," she said numbly. "I would have known."

"Do you know if anyone called on her this afternoon?" Shayne asked. "A man named Hannrahan?"

The fat woman looked up at him, tears in her eyes. "Who?"

"Rusty Hannrahan. I understand he lived in the hotel, up to a week or so ago. Big man, red hair, looked a lot like me."

Mimi Latour shook her head. "Must be a mistake. I know everybody in the hotel. Been here thirty years. Nobody named Hannrahan ever lived here."

The fat woman walked with Shayne to the door. "Where is Vicki?" she asked. She was emotionally upset and, if she was faking it, she was doing a good job. "I... I'd like to see her."

"She's at the city morgue," Shayne replied. He looked past her to the bird in the cage as it hopped up to its perch and repeated, "City morgue... city morgue..."

He said: "You sure about Hannrahan?"

The fat woman brushed tears from her eyes. "Never heard of him," she repeated. She managed a smile. "I'd surely remember him, if he looked like you."

Angie Myford, the woman assistant manager, was apprehensive when Shayne stepped out of the elevator and walked to the desk. She was sorry she had let him into Vicki's room. It could mean trouble with the police...

Shayne cut in. "Who's the fat woman in room 305?"

Angie glanced back at the pigeonholes. "Name's Mimi Latour... at least that's how she gets her mail."

"How long has she lived here?"

Angie shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I've only started on this job two weeks ago."

"Did Rusty Hannrahan come back here today?"

She stared at him, resenting the questioning now. Her mouth pursed. "I don't know why you're questioning me—" she began. "I had nothing to do with what happened to Miss Leronde."

"You may as well get used to it," the redhead said brusquely. "The police will be asking the same questions."

The angular woman licked her lips, obviously not liking the prospect. "I don't know anyone by that name," she muttered.

"Hannrahan lived here, up to a week ago," Shayne reminded her. "Jack Rubion told me he did, this afternoon."

She shook her head. "Mr. Rubion would know. He has worked here much longer than I—"

The phone rang. She was glad of the interruption. "Yes," she said, turning her back on Shayne, "Plaza Hotel..."

Shayne went outside. A cool wet wind was blowing. It would be clear by morning.

He walked around to the alley, stopped under the fire escape. The alley was littered. Dogs, cats and people had gone through the trash barrels, leaving behind empty beer cans, bottles, broken glass, rubbish, discarded TV dinners.

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe. A cat could have made it down that old iron ladder in a hurry and gone running up the alley without making noise. But a man couldn't.

The big redhead eyed the second floor window. It was closed, the blind pulled down. No light showed.

It was possible the prowler had not come all the way down to the alley. He could have ducked into that room. It explained how the prowler had disappeared so quickly, and without making any noise.

He went back into the hotel. Angie was hostile now, close-mouthed.

Shayne asked her who lived in that second floor room?

"I do," she snapped. "Goes with the job."

It was not the answer Shayne expected. He gritted his teeth. He was dog-tired, and his head ached. He couldn't think clearly. But he knew that the key to what he was after was here somewhere.

Angie placed his twenty dollar bill on the counter. "I don't take bribes," she said coldly. "When the police get here I'm going to tell them everything."

Shayne nodded. "Yeah—do that."

He drove back to his hotel, went to bed, fell asleep almost instantly.

IX

THE PHONE AWAKENED the redhead. He rolled over, groped for the receiver on his bedside table, growled, "Yeah—Shayne."

Tim's voice sounded excited. "I think I've got something for you. When can you come over?"

"Give me thirty minutes," Shayne replied.

He hung up, showered, shaved, checked the small cut hidden under his shock of red hair, and drove out to the Miami Daily News. The big city room was busy. Carl Dirksen waved to him as Shayne went by. The redhead stopped by Tim Rourke's desk.

The ace reporter was on the

phone. He waved to Mike, continued talking for another minute or so while Shayne pulled up a chair and sat down. There was a stack of old newspapers on Tim's desk, a cigaret burning in an old clamshell ashtray and a styrom coffee cup at Tim's elbow.

Shayne reached over, took a long swallow from Tim's coffee. He had come right over, without stopping for breakfast, and the coffee looked good to him right now.

Finished, Tim, turned to the big redhead. He had yesterday's classified section on his desk. He handed it to Shayne. "Take a look, Mike."

Shayne scowled, glanced at the page. Tim had drawn a circle around a small item in blue pencil. It read, *Hannrahan: I want my share of estate or I tell all. Documented letter ready to mail. Vicki.*

"Mean anything to you?" Tim asked.

Shayne nodded slowly. "If it's the same Vicki." He looked at the ace reporter. "Since when have you started doing classifieds?"

Tim grinned. "I always check the personals, Mike. Sometimes there's a human interest story I can follow up."

Shayne reread the message. It could explain why the intruder had been going through

Vicki's room last night. And it tied Vicki in with Hannrahan.

Tim was calling the copy boy over, asking him to bring Shayne a cup of coffee.

"What did you find on Hannrahan?" Shayne asked.

Tim shrugged. "Nothing. If he lived in Miami and did any type of entertaining here, he didn't make the papers." He pointed to the stack of papers on his desk. "But there's quite a bit on Helen Carstairs."

Shayne eyed the stack. "Just give me a rundown," he requested.

"Lot of background on her Las Vegas showgirl days," Tim said. "Not much family history. Guess she preferred to forget that. She met Henry Carstairs in Las Vegas three years ago. He was there with friends, on a retirement celebration." Tim smiled crookedly. "Seems Carstairs is no angel himself. He was married twice before his last wife died. Helen Morgan is his fourth."

Shayne was still trying to fit Rusty Hannrahan into the picture. "Any other men in her life? Actors, show business people... someone with red hair?"

Tim smiled. "Quite a few. But no one named Hannrahan, and nobody with red hair."

Shayne lighted a cigaret. Not much to go on. Showgirl mar-



ries rich old man out for one last fling before taking up residence in Forest Lawn.

"Looks like Helen Morgan always wanted to be an actress," Tim went on. "She's been active in local theater, took a couple of walk-on parts.

Last one was at the Majestic. Hoary old Shaw play, Major Barbara. Anton Hauser directed. It died a merciful death after a week.

Shayne finished his coffee. "Thanks, Tim."

Rourke glanced across the big room. "Carl's been after me," he said quietly. "I think our city editor smells a big story."

"It's still confidential," Shayne said bluntly.

The ace reporter nodded. "I'll keep a lid on it. But I'd hate to be scooped, Mike."

"You won't," Shayne promised. He got up, started to leave.

"Oh, one other thing," Tim said. "I checked with our society editor, Nina Gurley. Seems there's a rumor circulating that Henry Carstairs is seeking a divorce. He's out of town, talking to his lawyers right now."

Shayne frowned, absorbing this new information. It put a new face on a question that had bothered him from the beginning. All at once, it meant that Helen Carstairs, ex-showgirl, might not be sitting on the Carstairs millions. Which meant that a quarter of a million dollars in insurance money, plus a hockable diamond set worth about as much, would be a tidy-enough nest egg for Mrs. Carstairs, if the courts proved less than

generous in a divorce settlement.

"It's just a rumor so far," Tim cautioned. "But I can check it out for you, Mike."

Shayne nodded. "Do that."

Shayne had breakfast in one of the nearby coffee shops, then drove to his office. He found Lucy Hamilton inside, straightening his files, when he walked in.

The redhead shook off his surprise. "What are you doing here, Angel?"

"Tidying up," Lucy answered. She looked pale, not too well. "I just couldn't stay away any longer," she added. "Look at this place... it's a mess."

"Go home and rest," Shayne growled.

"Where's your new secretary?" Lucy asked. Her voice was firm, but she sat down, her weakness showing.

"She quit on me," Shayne told her. He reached down, helped Lucy to her feet. "Look, I'll tell you all about it later. Go on home, get back into bed. I don't want your dying on my conscience."

She looked him straight in the eye. She knew the redhead like a book. "You're in trouble again, Michael?"

He smiled. "Not enough to worry you, Angel."

She picked up her purse. "All right, I'll go home. But, if you

do need help, I want you to call me."

He nodded.

"Oh!" She turned to the desk. "Some mail for you. Just came in."

"Anything important?"

"Junk, mostly," Lucy answered. "But one looks personal. It's from a woman, I'd say."

"Maybe an old girlfriend," Shayne suggested.

He picked up the small packet of mail on the desk, started to go through it. He found the one Lucy was referring to. Pastel pink envelope—the sort of notepaper women used. It had a faint but unmistakable scent of lilacs. There was no return address.

"Aren't you going to read it?" Lucy sounded piqued.

"Later," Shayne replied.

He walked with her down to the parking lot, saw her into her car, watched her drive away. The phone was ringing when he returned to his office.

"You're a hard man to find," Gentry growled. "I called every bar in town."

"What's new?" Shayne asked.

"You viewed the body?"

"Yeah," Shayne replied. "She was the girl I hired. Went under the name of Irma, but her real name was Vicki. I gave all that to Lambertson at the city morgue."

Gentry's tone was short. "You don't like Terry Lambertson?"

"How can you tell?"

"He's a good man," Gentry growled.

"I'm not partial to cops with full beards and long curly hair," Shayne admitted.

"Don't let his looks fool you," Gentry said. "He came in from New York. I'm glad to have him in my precinct. He's on a special case—"

"I don't like the way he looked me over," Shayne growled.

"That's the way he works," the police chief said. "Don't get riled over it, Mike. You've got nothing to worry about."

"I'll remember that," Shayne growled.

"Did you get in touch with Hobart?"

"Yeah."

"What did he want?"

Shayne hesitated. "He wanted to hire me to investigate Mrs. Carstairs."

"Helen Carstairs!" Shayne could almost see the shock on Gentry's face. "Why?"

"I promised not to tell," Shayne answered. "Confidential, between me and my client."

Gentry exploded. "Damn it, Mike, how are we going to do our job if everyone starts claiming their constitutional right not to talk to the police! News

reporter, lawyers, private detectives—”

Shayne smiled. “Sorry, Will.”

He hung up. He knew Gentry would calm down later. And the redhead could sympathise with Miami's chief of police. Gentry and the men under him had to walk a constant tightrope between the public and the criminals, had to make choices between cracking down on criminals and being berated for harassment and undue police brutality.

Shayne picked up the perfumed envelope, tore it open. There was a note inside, short and to the point:

“Dear Mike:

Sorry we got mixed up the other night. I hid the packet in a bus station locker. Key enclosed. I'll be waiting for you at the airport as agreed.

Love,

Vicki.

X

SHAYNE STUDIED the message. The postmark was blurred. There was no telling when it had been mailed, but it had to be yesterday, just before Vicki was killed. It was hard even to make out the substation that had stamped it.

He slipped the envelope and locker key into his coat pocket. The bus terminal was a

twenty-minute ride from his office.

It could be a trap—a setup.

Still, Vicki had to have been an accomplice of the imposter who had robbed Hobart. It could be that Vicki felt she was being doublecrossed... and she had no doubt watched enough TV dramas to know that holding out a threat of mailing evidence to the police might get her what she wanted.

It had not saved her from being killed. But it was possible the killer had strangled her before he saw the classified notice... and had gone back to the Plaza to search her room for it.

The packet mentioned in Vicki's note might contain the evidence implicating Hannahan—or it might contain the missing jewelry. It was ambiguous, it seemed to implicate the big redhead. It was obvious Vicki would not be waiting at the airport for him.

Shayne walked to his bureau, took his shoulder holster from a bottom drawer, checked the loads in the Smith & Wesson .38, slipped the harness on. Under his coat it didn't show.

There was a red MG parked across the street with nobody in it. Shayne noticed it as he swung his Buick out of the parking lot and headed downtown. He noticed it again

a few minutes later, behind him. Then it turned off down a side street and he didn't see it again.

The bus terminal was crowded. Buses were pulling up at the unloading docks, people coming and going, the loudspeakers blaring names, departure times, arrivals.

Shayne looked around. A uniformed security guard, gun in holster, watched from beside the cigar and newstand concession. Frank Kennedy, plainclothes, from robbery detail, walked by. Kennedy usually worked the bus stations and airports, checking pickpockets. Kennedy gave Shayne a look and passed on, making no sign of recognition.

Mike Shayne took out the key Vicki had enclosed. It had number 18 stamped on it. He threaded his way to the bank of lockers just off the main terminal floor, found number 18.

A stout man in business suit came up with a heavy suitcase. There was a vacant locker next to 18. He began to fumble in his pocket for coins.

Shayne fitted his key into his locker, opened it. A small manila envelope lay inside. He reached for it, got his fingers on it...

The warning tingle at the back of his neck saved the big redhead's life. He jerked back,

started to spin away... the bullet missed the back of his head by inches, ripped through the fleshy part of his left shoulder, slammed into the side of the steel wall locker, ricocheted away.

There was no sound of a gun firing. Shayne staggered, fell against the lockers, dropping the manila envelope. Another bullet whined angrily close to his face as Shayne dropped to the floor.

The stout man struggling with his heavy suitcase yelled in sudden panic. He tried to run, tripped over Shayne, fell upon him.

For a few moments they remained tangled up as people around them panicked. Shayne finally managed to shove the heavy man away, lurched to his feet, fell back against the lockers. His left shoulder hurt.

He took a deep breath, reached down for the envelope at his feet. A quick hand beat him to it.

Shayne straightened, looked into the bearded face of Terry Lambertson. The security guard, gun drawn, was coming up behind him.

Lambertson said quietly: "You're under arrest, Shayne!"

Chief Gentry sat behind his desk, a cigar clamped between his teeth. He was angry, and it showed.

"Let's get this straight, Lambertson," he said. "You received an anonymous call informing you that the man who killed Vicki Leronde would be in the bus terminal, picking up stolen jewelry?"

Lambertson was leaning against the wall, a quiet, softspoken man. He nodded. "I was in Lieutenant Judson's office when the call came in. I told Judson I'd check it out."

Gentry turned to Shayne seated in a chair, his shoulder bandaged. It was a private interrogation. There was no one else present in the chief's office.

"This is what you went to collect, Mike?"

Gentry picked up the small manila envelope, shook out a large diamond brooch onto his desk.

Shayne nodded. "It was a setup, Will. I was followed to the bus station. I was supposed to pick up the envelope, then shot. Vicki's letter would help pin the Hobart robbery on me. And with me dead, the police would close the case."

"Not entirely." Gentry cut in grimly. "We'd still be looking for the man who shot you."

"Rusty Hannrahan?" Shayne's lips tightened wryly. "If there is a Hannrahan."

Gentry scowled. "Has to be. You didn't rob Hobart, but somebody who looked a lot like

you did. And you said even the Plaza hotel clerk mistook you for Hannrahan."

Shayne nodded. "I think I know who the imposter is," he said. "Give me twenty-four hours and I'll bring him in."

Gentry chewed on his cigar, looked at Lambertson. "What do you say, Terry?"

Lambertson smiled. "I think I can smell a setup when I see one." He shrugged. "Not my case, anyway."

"I'll need a favor," Shayne said to Gentry.

The police chief nodded. "Within reason," he growled. He leaned back, shook his head. "You should be in a hospital."

Mike Shayne agreed. "That's where I'm going," he said. "In a police ambulance. And I want a police guard at my door."

Gentry scowled. "That's the easy part, Mike."

"I want to put in a call right now to Tim Rourke at the *Daily News*. I want to give him a story. Mike Shayne shot in bus terminal. Police looking for suspect named Rusty Hannrahan."

Gentry took his cigar from his mouth, spat bits of tobacco into his wastebasket.

"It could backfire," he warned.

"Maybe," Mike said grimly. "I'll know before the day's over."

A doctor re-examined the bullet wound in Shayne's arm at the hospital. The fingers of his left hand felt stiff. His shoulder throbbed.

A nurse came in and gave him a shot. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, and sunlight was breaking through dissipating clouds, that slanted in through his window.

There was a uniformed officer on guard outside his door. He had been told what to do.

Shayne watched television for a while, then dozed. When he awakened, a nurse was bringing him his dinner tray. He ate heartily. Who said hospital fare was inedible? The nurse came back a while later and took away his tray.

Shayne got out of bed, walked to the window. It was dark now outside. He went to the small closet, slipped into his clothes, his shoulder holster.

The officer on guard in the corridor turned as Mike Shayne opened the door. He looked up and down the hallway, nodded. Shayne slipped out and went quickly to the back stairway. The officer remained at his station in front of Shayne's hospital room.

There was no Miami moon. A few scattered stars looked down on Shayne as he sauntered around to the front of the large

hospital, got into a waiting cab. "The Majestic," he said, sliding into the back seat.

The cabbie tooled through Miami's streets, heading for the theater district. He pulled up in front of a small theater with a darkened box office. A sign in the window said a rehearsal opening next week was LOVERS AND STRANGERS, a new play by a young Miami playwright, Leonard Santucci.

Shayne glanced at a late copy of the Miami Daily News before going inside. A bold headline read, ACE PRIVATE DETECTIVE SHOT IN MIAMI BUS TERMINAL.

He read a little of the story below the head. Tim had done a good job.

The theater was dark, save for footlights bathing the stage and a couple of dim wall lights. Shayne picked his way down the middle aisle to the front row, where Anton Hauser, a middle-aged, bearded man with a thick European accent was watching the actors on stage.

An assistant director, a youngster fresh out of college and a theater arts graduate, was marking out guidelines on the stage.

Shayne slipped into the seat next to Anton. The director scowled at him. Shayne showed him his credentials.

"I need some information," he

said. "About a play you directed some time ago. Shaw's *Major Barbara?*"

Anton nodded. "Good play—bad actors." He eyed Shayne. "You see it?"

"No. But I'm interested in who played in it."

"Mrs. Henry Carstairs had a small part. The lead was played by Marjorie Hammond... she had New York stage experience."

"Who played opposite her?"

"An unknown actor named Jack Rubion." Anton shrugged. "Mrs. Carstairs insisted on it. And—it was her money."

Shayne nodded. "Thanks."

He left the theater, looked back at the marquee. A play was going on inside... but another drama was unfolding outside. A drama with a half million dollars at stake—and death to the loser.

XI

SHAYNE TOOK A CAB to the bus terminal, where his Buick was still parked. He headed for the bridge across Biscayne Bay toward the high-rise hotels of Miami Beach that loomed against the night sky.

On the way, Shayne stopped to make two purchases. One was an inexpensive attaché case. The other was an old-fashioned alarm clock.

He turned north on Collins Avenue. In Bal Harbour he asked directions of a gas station attendant who had been around long enough to know most of the residents.

The Carstairs estate lay hidden from the street behind an eight-foot wall and shrubbery. The entrance was guarded by an iron gate with a guard box just inside.

Shayne drove up to the closed gate, honked his horn. A guard stepped out of his cubicle, looked at him through the iron grillwork.

Shayne stuck his head out of the car window, said, "I have an appointment with Mrs. Carstairs."

The gateman wanted to know who he was.

"Hannrahan," Shayne replied. "It's about some jewelry."

The gateman went back inside his booth, called the house. Shayne could only see his head as he nodded, frowned, then stepped outside to look Shayne over. He went back to his phone, said something Shayne couldn't hear, nodded again and hung up. He touched a button and the iron driveway gates swung open. He waved Shayne in.

Shayne drove followed a curving driveway up to the large, sprawling house a quarter of a mile away. There was a

small red MG parked under the portico. The big redhead pulled up behind it, went to the front door, rang the bell.

A colored maid answered, said, "Mr. Hannrahan? Mrs. Carstairs is expecting you."

She led him down a wide hallway, across a large sitting room and through white-slatted double doors into the breakfast room whose windowed walls overlooked an outside terrace and a lawn that sloped down to a small private cove. A seventy-foot yacht rode at anchor there, its portholes lighted.

Helen Carstairs was sitting at the breakfast room glass-topped table, overlooking the terrace. She was having a late dinner. There was a silver covered casserole on the table, a long stemmed crystal wine glass in front of her and what looked like lobster thermidor on her plate.

She looked up as the maid announced Shayne as Hannrahan. "Mr. Hannrahan," she said, and there was a small smile on her full lips. She was a tall woman, well-figured, still strikingly beautiful. She was wearing a skimpy bathing suit under a terrycloth robe and Shayne could see why she had been a Las Vegas showgirl.

He came up to the table, carrying his attache case. "I'm not Hannrahan," he said bluntly.

"I know," she said. She didn't seem surprised. "You're the private investigator Jay Hobart hired to investigate *me*." She smiled as she lifted her wine glass to her lips. "You're Mike Shayne, aren't you?"

It was the big redhead's turn to be surprised. He stared at her, frowning.

"Please sit down," Mrs. Carstairs invited. She turned to the colored maid. "Bring place setting for Mr. Shayne. And the imported brandy...the Napoleon."

The maid disappeared.

Mike Shayne sat down across from Helen Carstairs. He could look out at the small cove where the yacht rode at anchor. A surf was foaming slowly on the sand of the private beach.

"Do you like night bathing, Mr. Shayne?"

The private detective turned his attention back to her. "Sometimes."

"I always take a dip before turning in," Mrs. Carstairs said.

Shayne shrugged. "Sorry, but I forgot to bring along my bathing trunks."

"No need," Helen Carstairs replied. She leaned back, eyed Shayne. "This is a private beach—and skinny-dipping is all the rage these days, isn't it?"

Shayne frowned. He wasn't

sure if this was an invitation or mere comment.

"We're quite alone," Mrs. Carstairs went on. "My husband's out of town."

"I know," Shayne cut in. He leaned forward, said bluntly: "Let's get down to business, Mrs. Carstairs."

"By all means," she murmured.

"You know I'm Mike Shayne, not Hannrahan. Then you know why I'm here."

She looked across the table at him, a small, teasing smile on her lips. She was a tawny-haired blonde, her body fit, tanned.

"Someone passing himself off as Mike Shayne stole a diamond set you left with Mr. Hobart for resetting," Shayne said. "Hobart says it was paste, not worth a hundred dollars. The thief knew it when he stole it."

"Hobart can't prove that," Mrs. Carstairs said. She said it without heat, almost indifferently.

"No, he can't," Shayne admitted. "Not yet, anyway."

The maid came soft-footing into the breakfast room with a bone china setting and silverware. She laid them down in front of Shayne, with a snifter and the Napoleon brandy in a slate-colored stone bottle.

"Lobster thermidor?" Mrs.

Carstairs said, lifting the cover from the silver casserole.

Shayne shook his head. "I've had dinner."

Mrs. Carstairs shrugged. "Brandy then?"

Shayne eyed the bottle. He couldn't afford it, not at fifty dollars a fifth. He poured, held the inhaler between his palms, savoring the aroma that rose from it.

"The imposter who robbed Hobart was hired by you," Shayne said, "to make sure Hobart couldn't prove the set was a fake. You had his receipt... his insurance would have to pay off."

"Mr. Shayne," she cut in gently, "you do go on. But I doubt if the police will believe your story."

"I think they will," the big redhead said. "Let me finish. The man who called himself Rusty-Hannrahan, a sometimes actor and night-club entertainer, lived at the Plaza. You know the hotel, don't you, Mrs. Carstairs?"

"The Plaza?" She made a show of trying to recall, her plucked brows lifting slightly. "Oh, of course—that old hotel in Miami, once frequented by famous show people."

"It still is," Shayne commented drily, "except that the new clientele is no longer famous, or wealthy."

Helen Carstairs took a cigaret from her deep beach robe pocket, set it carefully into a water filter holder. "I'm trying to cut down," she said casually. "This is supposed to help."

"Hannrahan had an accomplice," Shayne continued. "A girl named Vicki Leronde. She was a dancer and an entertainer—and she, too, lived at the Plaza."

"How convenient!" Helen said. She blew smoke lazily across the table. "It seems I've heard that story line before."

"The plot is the same," Shayne admitted. "But the ending is different." He watched the yacht rolling at anchor in the cove as he talked. A man had lowered a dinghy over the stern and was now rowing in toward the small pier. It was too dark for the redhead to make out who the man was.

"Vicki was found floating in the Bay yesterday," Shayne said. "She had been strangled."

For the first time, a disturbed flicker appeared in the ex-showgirl's eyes. "I'm sorry to hear that," she said. Her voice sounded sincere.

"Maybe Hannrahan found out she was holding him up for more than she ad agreed on," Mike continued. "Or maybe he was afraid she'd get cold feet and go to the police with her story, hoping for clemency."

Mrs. Carstairs smile was a little forced. "I really don't know why any of this should concern me, Mr. Shayne. I don't know anyone named Hannrahan."

"But you did let your gate-man pass me through when I told him I was Hannrahan," Shayne pointed out.

Helen Carstairs bit her lip. "I had him describe you to me. I knew who you were. I wanted to hear what you had to say."

Shayne nodded. "I'll lay it all out for you," he said. "There is no Rusty Hannrahan. There never was. He was a red herring, a decoy, to throw me and the police off the track of the real imposter."

The man in the small boat was tying up at the pier. He was a shadowy figure under the droplight at the end of the small stone wharf. He turned and started walking toward the house, and Shayne saw he was wearing a marine cap.

"Then, if there is no one named Hannrahan," Helen Carstairs said, "I could not have hired him to steal my fake jewelry, could I?"

"Not Hannrahan," Shayne replied, nodding. "But an old friend, Jack Rubion."

It hit home. Helen Carstairs started, her face tightening. "Jack??"

"From...way back in Los

Angeles, before you ever went to Vegas. Jack was an actor, but he never made it in the big time. He came to Miami after he read about you marrying Henry Carstairs. He took a desk clerk's job at the Plaza."

She was staring at him now, her face white. Her hand shook as she butted out her cigaret in the tray.

"You saw him off and on... even got him a part in a local play you sponsored." Shayne paused, watching her. "What was he doing, Mrs. Carstairs—blackmailing you?"

She opened her mouth to say something, but couldn't get the words out.

"That's part of it, Shayne," a voice behind the redhead said. Then, cold and level, as Shayne stiffened, "Easy, big feller. Turn around real slow—and keep your hands in sight!"

XII

SHAYNE TURNED. Jack Rubion stood in the doorway of the breakfast room, a gun in his right hand.

"I thought I killed you at the bus terminal," he said. "At least, put you out of commission."

"You had a better chance," Shayne said, "last night in Vicki's room."

Jack shrugged. "I could have,

easily enough. But it wasn't the right time."

"Because you wanted to lay it on Hannrahan," Shayne said. "The man you made up."

Jack smiled. "You caught on fast, Shayne. I'll give you credit for that." He looked at Helen Carstairs. "The yacht ready?"

She licked her lips. "Jack—I didn't know... about Vicki..."

"She tried to hold me up for fifty grand," Jack said roughly. "I had to do it."

Through the window Shayne could see a man coming across the lawn toward the house—one of the yacht's crew, probably.

"Sorry, Shayne," Jack said. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to dump your body into the ocean, a long way from here."

Helen stood up. "Jack... I agreed to go along on the jewelry switch. But murder—"

"Is sometimes necessary," Jack cut in. He raised his gun. "Sorry, Shayne. If you had taken that flight to Chicago when you were supposed to—"

"I'm sorry, too," Shayne said.

He had the attaché case in his lap. He lifted it now, placed it on the table in front of him, glanced at his wristwatch. "In just about a minute and a half, we'll all be blown to bits."

Helen Carstairs gasped, shrank back against the windows. Jack sneered. "An old

gag, Shayne, from an even older melodrama. I figured you for better than that."

Shayne shrugged. "We've got less than ninety seconds now."

Helen's gaze sought Jack's. Her voice was strained. "For heaven's sake, Jack!"

Jack moved closer. "He's bluffing, Helen."

Shayne smiled. "Listen."

In the momentary silence, the ticking of an alarm clock could be heard.

"I've got the key to this attaché case on me," Shayne said. "But you won't have time to find it before the dynamite goes off."

Helen moaned, started to sidle toward the end of the breakfast room. Rubion stared at the case, licked his lips.

Shayne glanced at his watch. "Fifty seconds."

Rubion made a lunge for the attaché case. He picked it up, sent it crashing through the breakfast room windows. Then he whirled, a split second too late.

Mike Shayne had his gun unholstered. The bullet spun Jack Rubion around, sent him sprawling.

Shayne moved like a panther around the table. . . . he came down on Jack, pinned him to the floor, snapped a pair of cuffs around his wrists.

Further on, Helen Carstairs'

kneed sagged. She slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

The attache case lay in the shrubbery below the broken window. It did not go off. There was no dynamite in it.

* * *

"Helen Carstairs will testify," Shayne told Gentry later in the police chief's office. "She wasn't in on the murder of Vicki Leronde. . . . she wants no part of a murder charge."

"But she was in on the jewelry switch," Gentry said.

Shayne nodded. "She was being blackmailed by Rubion. She and her husband had already had a falling out. Henry Carstairs was talking divorce, and he had closed all his bank accounts to her." Shayne lighted a cigaret. "What was worse, she knew she'd never get a dime from Carstairs, after the divorce."

"why not?"

"Because, legally, she was never married to Carstairs," Shayne went on. "She and Jack Rubion had been married years ago, back in Los Angeles. She was only a kid, then. . . . eighteen. A runaway from home, Hollywood bound."

Shayne shrugged. "She went on to Las Vegas instead and Jack dropped out of sight. A mutual friend told her Jack had

died. She never filed for divorce, or had her status legalized. She preferred to forget the whole thing."

"Until he showed up here," Gentry said. He leaned back, took out a cigar, bit off the end, lighted up. He offered one to the big redhead.

"Better for you than those coffin nails you smoke," Gentry growled.

Shayne declined.

"You were damn lucky," Gentry said. "You could have had your head blown off!"

Shayne shrugged. "Goes with the job," he said.

He left Gentry's office and paused on the stone steps out-

side the station. It was a nice warm Miami day. Made him think of Henderson, waiting for him in Chicago. Of two weeks fishing for steelhead in the north Michigan lakes.

What the hell! He had turned in a written, signed deposition to the D.A.'s office, and he would be back long before the case came to trial. His office could stay closed until Lucy was feeling up to taking over.

Shayne headed for his car. He'd stop in on Lucy, tell her. And—he remembered he owed Tim Rourke a dinner. He grinned. Tim would understand when he mailed him a card from Michigan.

READ: In the Next issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

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New Short Novel

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MSMM is delighted to be able to bring you this horrifying, macabre and altogether true to modern backwoods life story by a writer not only new to these pages but to virtually all professional publication. We know little of her background except that it is rich with authenticity, as rich as it is with terror whose impact is increased rather than lessened by the fact that it springs from peaceful everyday life.

Ellen Neudeck was desperate from lack of sleep—so she decided to take immediate action.

**IT MUST
BE
YOU, HARRY**
by
**ERNEST
SAVAGE**

ELLEN NEUDECK WAS awake again, staring at the ceiling and listening to Leo bark. She had taken her demerol at 11:30, as usual, and fallen into a light sleep an hour later, as usual, and now at one-thirty was awake again. As usual.

It's the Hortons' cat, she thought; and of course, Harry was on his back again, snoring. Reflexively, she groped for the yardstick on the floor at the right side of her bed; and when she got a good grip on it, she shoved it harshly into Harry's ribs. Harry snorted and huffed and then rolled over and was



silent again in his bed, two feet from hers.

If the Horton's cat didn't prowl at night, she thought, then Leo wouldn't bark at it and she could get some sleep. "I would do anything," she whis-

pered, "for a good night's sleep."

She had been on demerol for over six months. Dr. Peters had prescribed it for her and arranged for automatic renewals of the prescription so that she wouldn't have to keep coming back to him. He said she'd probably need it for quite a while. He told her she had unusually acute hearing, that she was naturally sensitive and high-strung, and that very probably—at 45—she was beginning her change. He had told her to try one capsule each night and if that didn't work to take a second, but *only* if the first didn't work, and *never more than two*.

Wearily, Ellen got up and went to the bathroom. She took a capsule from the bottle in the medicine chest and held it in her hand, indecisively. A soft warm breeze drifted across her shoulders from the open bathroom window, accompanied by Leo's big, brash bark.

She turned out the light and went to the window and when her eyes had adjusted she saw him standing at the solid wooden alley fence, barking at the Hortons' cat. She was sure it was the Hortons' cat because she'd put on her slippers and robe one night a week ago and gone out there and seen it, just standing there in the alley, tail

straight up in the air looking back at her, sassy as a teen-age brat.

She could have killed it.

For a long time she stood there at the bathroom window, watching and listening to Leo, the capsule gripped in her fist. If only it were cool enough to shut the windows, she thought, but it was never that cool in town. Was nobody else awake out there? Were there no other lonely souls staring at the night? Was she the only one?

She felt the tensions building in her as they always did and didn't even try to fight them this time. And then, quite suddenly, the idea came to her. *I will kill it*, she said to herself, *I'll kill the Hortons' cat! How incredibly simple!*

She turned on the light again and counted the capsules remaining in the bottle—twenty—plus the one in her hand, twenty-one. She was excited. How many would it take to do the job, she wondered. She surmised it was a matter of weight, so much per pound. Mickey was big and meaty and tough.

Would ten do it? Twelve? She had no firm idea, but knew she would have to save them from her own allotment, because Dr. Peters was very careful about scheduling refills. It would mean ten or twelve entirely

sleepless nights, but it would be worth it because of the peace that would follow.

She felt ever so much better when she returned to bed, and was almost unaware of picking up the yardstick and prodding Harry in the ribs. He'd rolled on his back again . . .

The next afternoon, she caught the Hortons' cat in the alley and carried it in the house and upstairs to the bathroom, where the scales were. She'd weighed herself just minutes before—116—and with the cat in her arms, the scales read 129. So he weighed 13 pounds.

He was purring, his tail switching sensuously as she carried him back to the alley and let him go. Leo was barking up a storm in the garage, where she'd locked him, but she was so excited, so full of her plan, she scarcely heard him, even when she let him back in the yard.

Thirteen pounds. Thirteen capsules? A capsule per pound? It seemed reasonable—it had a nice balance to it. So that evening after supper, with Harry watching a ball game on TV, settled in his chair like a skivvy-shirted Buddha, a can of cold beer in his hand, cigar ashes dribbling down the cascading rolls of his chest and belly, she mixed the contents of thirteen capsules into a tin of

smelly fish and put it in the alley for the Horton cat's last supper.

And so it was. Before lunch the next day, Mrs. Horton had made the rounds of the neighborhood, sharing her grief with all those who had known and loved old Mickey. She had tears in her eyes when she told Ellen Neudeck of the tragedy and thought Mrs. Neudeck a little cold when she said that maybe Mickey's time had come, as it comes for us all.

But that night, at one o'clock, Mrs. Neudeck was wakened from a light sleep by Leo again, loud and angry as ever. And of course, Harry was on his back, sawing wood, as usual.

She prodded him awake and said, "Harry, we've got to get rid of Leo."

"Wha—?"

"Can't you hear him barking?"

"Wha—?"

"I said, we've got to get rid of the dog. He makes too much noise."

"No way."

"Harry, I can't sleep."

"He's a good hunter, a great hunter."

"You haven't been hunting with him for five years."

"Nex' year goin' huntin'—great dog."

"Harry, roll over on your side."

"Wha—?" He sounded so stupid when half awake.

She poked him in the ribs and he grunted once and was quiet again. Wearily she got up and went to the bathroom. For a long time she stood at the window and watched Leo's dark shape move around the yard, barking at the alley fence and then at the fence between their house and the Meyer's next door.

He was getting old; his bark sounded almost senile, Mrs. Neudeck thought, with a kind of quaver in it. And of course, Harry would never take him hunting again, because Harry would never go hunting again himself—nor bowling, nor fishing, nor anything. It was all in the TV set for him now, his whole life.

She turned on the light and counted her demerol capsules. She had ordered a renewal from Dr. Peter's office and would pick it up tomorrow at the pharmacy, 45 of them—plus the seven she still had. She'd taken one at 11:30 that night, as usual, but now she resolved not to take another because, after all, she wouldn't sleep anyway, and she would need them.

She went back to bed and stretched out on the warm sheets and stared at the ceiling. Automatically, completely unaware of it, she prodded Harry

with the yardstick and told him to roll over.

Then she wondered how much Leo weighed.

The next afternoon, she decided she couldn't carry Leo up to the bathroom, so she took the scales down to the garage. After a lot of fuss, she finally got him up in her arms, but he was so wiggly and big she couldn't see to step on the scales, so she dropped to her knees and got his hind feet on the platform and thought she saw the number ten on the dial.

It was humid and she was coated with sweat and Leo had snarled meaningfully at her twice and so she let him go and did a little simple arithmetic. If his rear end weighed ten, then his front end must weigh ten, plus, say, two for the head and three more to make sure—twenty-five in all.

She liked the formula of a capsule per pound. It had worked for the Hortons' cat and so had gained in her a mind a sort of authority. But if she gave Leo 25, she would have only 27 for herself and 45 days before she could get more.

She opened the side door of the garage and watched Leo limp into the yard, his arthritis evidently activated by their wrestling match. Then there was the problem, she thought, of getting him to take that

many. She had tasted one herself and found it strongly bitter. Twenty-five of them might put him off even the most succulent dish she could contrive.

But his tastes were eclectic and, in the ten years they'd had him, he'd eaten from a menu as varied as their own. Beef stew, with onion, carrots, celery, potatoes, cloves, everything—all swimming in a heavily spiced broth—was a dish he'd shared with them many times. And would once again, she thought.

It was Harry's favorite dish, too, and they hadn't had it for quite a while; so that was it, she decided, but she put off preparing it until a week from the following Saturday, because she didn't want to be so out of balance with her own capsules. Besides, there was a big ball-game scheduled for that evening and Harry would be completely diverted by it. He'd been talking about nothing else for days.

But it was two weeks of hell for her. She had read somewhere that the human being can get along on surprisingly little sleep, and that some people almost literally don't sleep at all—but she didn't believe it. They must be weirdoes, or something. Zombies, maybe, as she was becoming.

She could hardly bear to look

in the mirror anymore. She hadn't taken a capsule for nine straight days and she honestly didn't think she'd slept a wink in all that time. Nor had Leo, it seemed. All night long he went on, worse than ever, as though something unseen were haunting him.

Several times she had got up and stared out the bathroom window at him, and there he was, looking right up at her, yapping his head off. Not at the alley fence or the Meyer's, but at her. She could even see his teeth gleaming in the thin light of the new moon.

But the sacrifice would be worth it, she told herself, because when Leo was gone, she could sleep all night every night and the horrid black circles around her eyes would fade away and the strange visions she was seeing on the bedroom ceiling—her all-night movies, she called them—would cease.

On Friday, she bought the ingredients for the stew. She planned a kind of *pot au feu* broth to drench the meat, with peppercorns, salt, thyme and bay leaves, crushed garlic cloves, parsley, everything, in it. She would begin it in the morning so it could simmer all day, enriching itself.

"Hey kid," Harry said at supper that night—they were having red snapper—"you don't

look so hot lately, you know. Maybe you oughta go see Peters next week. Get yourself a shot of V-eight, or something."

He picked a bone from between his teeth, his blunt fingers still dark with grease from the shop.

"I can't sleep," she said.

"Ellie, it's all in your head. Anybody can sleep. You gotta learn to turn it all off."

"Turn what off?"

"Your head, kid, your head."

His eyes drifted back to the sports section of the paper, laid out alongside his plate, and she knew that that was that. She hadn't mentioned Leo to him since that night a couple weeks ago, and she didn't bother to now. He would scoff at her and tell her—as he had so many times before—that it was all in her head. Whatever was wrong, whatever she complained about, it was all in her head.

Well tomorrow, she thought, we'll find out if it's all in my head.

The stew was excellent. It was so good that Harry had three big helpings, but she had planned on that and made enough still to fill Leo's bowl to the brim. She had emptied the contents of the twenty-five demerols into a cheese glass before dinner and when she was preparing Leo's meal, she sprinkled the stuff over it like

salt and mixed it in thoroughly with a spoon.

Then she tasted it, just a sip, and couldn't detect any difference at all. Then she took a full spoon of the broth and held it in her mouth, swallowing just a bit at a time, and was certain that Leo would enjoy it just as much as Harry had.

He was waiting for her on the back porch when she put his bowl down and had half of it eaten in his greedy gulping way before she got back in the kitchen.

That night, they went to bed at the usual hour. Ellen took a capsule and was asleep almost at once. But it was strange. She was *conscious* of falling asleep, and was almost conscious, she felt, of *being* asleep. It was almost as though she were watching herself from above, from the ceiling, and noting her progress into unconsciousness. It was strange . . .

Then she was awake, her hand already gripping the yardstick, raising it and shoving it into Harry's fat-padded ribs.

"Harry," she said, "you're on your back again. Roll over."

Harry grunted once and the snores stopped. It was quarter to two.

She stared at the ceiling, wide awake. She was barely aware that Leo was silent, that

the only noise in the world was the sibilant, stuttering hiss of Harry's breath. Soon he would be snoring again and she didn't let go of the stick.

For a long time she lay there quietly, waiting for the weird movies to start on the ceiling—but they didn't and she didn't miss them. She had never enjoyed them anyway, and never understood them. They weren't really movies, they were just vague gray shapes that seemed to be searching for form. Like ideas you can't quite get hold of. No, she didn't miss them.

In fact, she felt quite comfortable, noting with surprise how loose and free of tensions her body seemed to be. Her mind seemed to be clearer than it ever had before. It was as though she had stepped through the last yard of dense, jungle onto high open ground.

It wasn't Mickey, she

thought, and it wasn't Leo. The clarity of that fact pleased and soothed her. Nothing had been so clear to her for a long time and she was delighted with the certainty of it. It was so good to be sure of something?? She wanted to tell Harry.

And just then, as though on cue, he began to snore and her hand came up automatically with the stick and jabbed him in the ribs.

"Harry," she said, "it wasn't Mickey and it wasn't Leo."

"Wha—?"

"I said, it wasn't the Horton's cat and it wasn't Leo."

"Wha—wha?"

He began to snore again and she prodded him viciously with the stick until he rolled over and was silent.

"It wasn't Mickey and it wasn't Leo," she said quietly. "So It must be you, Harry."

I wonder, she thought, how much he weighs.



WHO KILLED JOHNNY ROSELLI?

Roselli never trusted Sam Giancanna. But when the Chicago number one man was wiped out, his second in command found himself on the spot. The mystery remains as to who gave the order—the Mafia or the CIA?

by DAVID MAZROFF

THE BODY WAS IN an oil drum that floated in one of the Intra-Coastal Waterways in Fort Lauderdale. Whoever killed him hadn't thought it would rise to the surface because of holes drilled in the oil drum so it would fill with water and remain at the bottom of the waterway. However, the gas that had formed in the body brought the drum to the surface, where it was discovered by two men on an early-morning fishing expedition.

The body in the drum was that of a man who had long been associated with the National Crime Syndicate, specifically with the Chicago mob. He had been number-two man to Sam Giancanna. His name was Johnny Roselli.

The killer or killers had followed him from Chicago to Los Angeles, then to Las Vegas, where he had checked into the Moulin Rouge Hotel, a luxury establishment on the West Side, away from the glittering



Strip. It was operated by the Leonard Roy family, who were not associated with any of the mobs. It was, and is, a quiet and sedate hotel with beautiful grounds, an outdoor swimming pool, a casino, lounge and restaurant.

Here, Roselli relaxed and felt

he was safe from the hit-men he knew were out to kill him. After a few weeks, the hunch that flows through the blood of the fugitive and hunted told him to move on. He checked out and flew to the home of a sister in Fort Lauderdale. It was a fatal mistake.

Johnny Roselli had had a checkered career from the time he was in his teens. Like many other youths in the mobs, he was intelligent, street-wise, tough but not a bully. In his salad days, he was at once thief, hustler, runner for narcotics dealers, just about everything else that would turn a buck. Before he was twenty-one, he met Sam Giancanna, who was destined to rise to the top slot as the ruling Don of the Chicago Syndicate under the shrewd teaching of one of the smartest men in the Mafia, Tony Accardo.

Accardo was one of the very few in the National Crime Syndicate who had never seen the inside of a prison cell. His philosophy was to stay out of the limelight, keep in the background, and he was ultra-zealous in guarding his anonymity.

When he took Sam Giancanna under his wing, he tried to teach him the value of a low profile. But Giancanna could no more keep out of the limelight than a fly can keep away from sugar. His influence on Johnny Roselli was all-encompassing. Paradoxically, Roselli and Giancanna, were complete opposites physically and emotionally, and in their respective approaches to situations.

Giancanna was brutal, eager

to kill. Roselli was a mediator, a negotiator. He regarded killing as a senseless solution. A handsome man, soft-spoken, who dressed in quietly elegant expensive clothes, he was an anachronism. He no more belonged in the role of a mobster than Liberace as a fullback for the Baltimore Colts.

What Roselli wanted, from the days of his youth, was money and all the things that money could buy—expensive clothes, the best hotels, the finest wines and food, the most beautiful women wherever he was. That was the lure. Like other beautiful lures, the things that Johnny Roselli wanted from life led him to a violent end.

In the small hours, when the lady who spent the evening with him had departed, he often lay awake pondering the whys and wherefors of events that lay ahead, unsure and a little fearful of the day ahead.

How had he come to this point in his life? Where had he made his mistakes? There had been a variety of them. There was his association with Sam Giancanna—and his break with Sam. Roselli had allowed himself to get mixed up in a hot international plot. But he had never fought with anyone in the mob. He had disagreed with Giancanna several times, but

Giancanna was out of it—dead.

Sam Giancanna had been a Don. His death had opened up a power struggle. Giancanna had been killed gangland style. This was what bothered Roselli.

Giancanna began his rise to power when Al Capone was sent to prison for income tax evasion. Frank Nitti took over, on Capone's orders, with Tough Tony Accardo second in command, and Giancanna given "consideration" as Capone put it because he had been loyal. Nitti committed suicide. Accardo ruled for a decade. Then when he decided he wanted to retire, he began to groom Giancanna to take his place. That was the way it had gone.

SECOND IN COMMAND

WHEN GIANCANNA TOOK over as the Don of the Chicago mob he chose Johnny Roselli as his number one man. He put an arm around Roselli's shoulder in a gesture of deep friendship.

"Johnny, you and me is gonna go places from now on. We're gonna have more money than the Bank of Italy. We've been through a lot together and now we hit the jackpot." He squeezed Roselli's shoulder. Roselli grinned.

In the moment of silence that followed, Roselli felt a surge of doubt. Was this what he really



Johnny Roselli

wanted? He would be under Giancanna's thumb, subject to his orders, his whims and fancies, perhaps, the direction of his violences.

Roselli had never been asked to engage in any violence, in the muscling of stubborn merchants who refused to pay tribute, or in the executions of rivals, as Giancanna had done. Yet, at that moment, standing next to the man who regarded him as his closest friend, Roselli had the disturbing thought that he was at the threshold of dark hours.

One of the first tasks Giancanna handed him was to check

the scene in Las Vegas. The mob had points in several casinos. In the Mint Hotel and Casino, owned by Del Webb and where the mob had no points, Roselli met a beautiful blonde divorcée, an elegant woman with a figure that had been welded together by a brilliant genetic artist. Her name was Alison Watkins.

Alison Watkins worked the seven to three a.m. Shift as a cocktail waitress in the Keno room, serving free drinks to the men and women players. Roselli was strongly attracted. However, Alison had been propositioned by every kind of man, good and bad, who came into the Mint.

She recognized Roselli for what he was—handsome, smooth, polished. That was the rub. He was too much of all three, and a Syndicate mobster. The last turned her off.

He said, "I'll wait for you. We can go somewhere for a bite, breakfast, and then I'll take you home." He grinned. "Scout's honor."

She had to laugh at that. There was nothing derisive in the laugh. It merely struck her as being ludicrous—a mobster taking a scout's oath. "I'm sorry, Mr. Roselli, but I have a five-year-old child and I always go straight home when I'm through here."

"How about tomorrow for lunch?"

She demurred. "My time is really taken up. I need my rest, and I must give attention to my little boy."

"Well, I'll stick around until three. I should be lucky at the craps table. You know—'Unlucky in love, and so on.'"

"Yes, I know," she replied laconically. "According to *that* old saw, I should be a very rich woman. Excuse me, Mr. Roselli. I must attend to my work."

He waited until three but when he looked for her she was gone. He took a cab to the Moulin Rouge. There he encountered Michael Ellis, one of the assistant managers.

"There was a call for you, Mr. Roselli," Ellis said. "A young lady, I think."

"Did she leave a message?"

"Yes. She said, 'Lunch at one—Caesar's Palace.'"

Roselli didn't find what he had been sent to learn. The town was tied up tighter than a drum. He stayed three weeks, during which time he dated Alison Watkins. It was purely platonic. She was pleasant company, intelligent, witty, informed, an excellent conversationalist. They became good friends and that was where it ended when he finally left and went back to Chicago.

He reported to Giancanna.

"Nothing open, Momo. The Commission that supervises the casinos is tough. Bird dogs. Some of the boys have pieces, a few points here, a few points there, but that's all. I think you ought to forget about Vegas."

"No, no! We'll move in there. The place pukes money. I'll check with Accardo. He'll give me the lowdown."

Accardo said, "Listen, Momo, Las Vegas is off limits for our Combination. I know you sent Roselli out there. He pussy-footed-around, discreetly, sure. But, nobody can go into Vegas, ask questions like Roselli did and not have it bounce back."

"I got the word the second day he was there. I told the boys to leave him alone, that he was just interested in how things worked. Let me tell you something, though. Don't you ever do anything like that again without first checking with me. You *understand*? Okay, that's it."

Giancanna called Roselli into his suite at the Lexington and got on his back. He was still smarting from Accardo's rebuke. "What the hell's the matter with you, Johnny? Don't you know how to get a little information without blowing your cover?"

Roselli stared at Giancanna silently. He read the reason for his anger. In a low tone, he

said, "Get off my back, Momo. Nobody can make any kind of a suspicious move in Vegas that isn't taken back to the Organization. I knew that. I made my moves very soft, but I was reported anyway. That's it."

"Yeah, yeah. Okay. Who was that chick you spent so much time with out there? I got that information."

"Do I have to answer that, Momo?" His tone was icy. "And would you like to know how much time I spent in the bathroom?"

"No, just what there was about this chick that made you forget what you were there for?"

"I didn't forget why I was there. Okay, you asked me so I'll tell you. She is something very special—a lady." There was a sudden tinge of sadness in his voice. "When I left I dropped my soul at her feet. Anything else, Momo? Let's have it now."

Giancanna came to him, put an arm around his shoulder. "Okay, Johnny, forget it. I was out-of line. We'll straighten it out in time. Right now we got a lot of things to do here."

The 'things' Giancanna referred to were the takeover of the policy racket from Eddie Jones, a black, who was the king of the South Side numbers and gambling rackets.

VIOLENCE

THE MIND-SHATTERING realities of violences and murders that Giancanno set in motion in the attack on Eddie Jones and his organization shook the city. The surfacing of another gang war reminiscent of the day's when the forces of Capone and Dion O'Bannion shot it out on the streets resulted in newspaper editorials, cries from church groups and civic bodies.

Policy writers, pickup men, collectors and payoff men were beaten, some of them killed. Eddie Jones was riddled with machine-gun slugs as he walked from his home. All in all, there were a dozen murders and a score of beatings that sent men to hospitals in critical condition. That was Giancanna's way.

The money rolled in, pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, the pitiful small change of hopefuls looking toward a winning ticket of a few dollars with which to buy food, bread, milk, a piece of meat for a stew. Roselli refused to have anything to do with any phase of it.

Giancanna stormed at him. "You're my number one guy. All I ask you to do is to check on the take and the payoffs. Is that asking too damn much?"

"No, it isn't. But back of this damn operation are about a

dozen killings, wholesale slaughter, worse than the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. What the hell are you made of, Momo? Where the hell is your conscience?"

"Conscience? What the hell game do you think we're playing? Do you think Jones had a conscience?"

"All I know is that we could have taken over from Jones without any of the killings or the beatings—made a deal."

Giancanna laughed derisively. "With a Rock? You must be nuts! Jones would have sent his muscle men out to kill you, me, anyone else his hit-men would have found on the streets. Look, we got a million-dollar-a-year proposition and you're in for ten percent. You hate money that much?"

"No, I don't. I like it. But I don't like it covered with blood."

Giancanna turned from him and strode across the room in a state of agitation. He turned back to Roselli. "Over there." He pointed to a table near one of the windows looking out on Michigan Avenue. "On that table is twenty-five grand. You want it? It's your end. Two weeks' play. There's no blood on it!"

"On the surface, no. Underneath, yes. I don't want it."

Tension mounted between the two, heightened on the one side by Giancanna's uncontrollable temper and a flaunting of his authority, on the other by Roselli's refusal to be even marginally a part of wholesale murder.

During the years Accardo was in power, when he issued direct orders, killings were few and far between. Roselli was a liaison man for Accardo, smoothing things between the mob and businessmen. Now he found himself embroiled in personal clashes with Giancanna and in conflicts against the role Giancanna seemed intent to push him. He hated to be pushed. He refused to take it.

The upshot was that Accardo came into the picture again. He was as much, more perhaps, the mediator than was Roselli. He convinced Roselli to take his end of the money on assurance that his only task in the policy racket would be to check things out, men and money.

Giancanna felt vindicated and once again made peace with Roselli. "Pal, old pal—you and me—all the way. We have a beautiful setup. You and me ain't gotta fight each other."

Roselli realized, as Accardo did, that Giancanna was a hood, plain and not fancy. He had no class, no style, and his hot temper often destroyed

what common sense he had. He moved with the force of a tornado, blowing down everything that stood in his way.

Giancanna next sent Roselli to Los Angeles to look things over, in the same manner that Bugsy Siegel had been sent there by the Syndicate when Lucky Luciano was the Capo di Capi. Los Angeles was tied up. What gambling action was there was controlled by the New York branch of the Syndicate. Gambling was illegal there and the fuzz, in the main, wouldn't take a dime because the Internal Affairs division of the Police Department was alert to anything that smelled of corruption.

On his way to Los Angeles, Roselli stopped off in Las Vegas to see Alison Watkins. They had lunch once and that was all. She had absolutely no designs on Roselli. He was charming to her, and in a way that seems to attract many women from all walks of life to gangsters, the polished kind, she found him intriguing.

The aura of danger that surrounded him excited her, but only mildly. Why she saw him at all puzzled her except for the fact that he was different from all the men she had ever known.

She came from an excellent background. Her father was a

professor and her mother a concert pianist. When he left she made up her mind not to see him again. The whole thing, she told herself, was getting a little sticky, and there was some talk already in the casino which she regretted.

While Roselli was in Los Angeles, Giancanna moved into legitimate enterprises. Not as smart as Johnny Torrio or Meyer Lansky, his terrorizing of businessmen soon brought him to the attention of the Chicago Crime Commission. Once again, Accardo stepped in to dress Giancanna down.

"Who the hell do you think you are, Momo?" Accardo shouted. You want to take over the whole damn city? Those days are gone. They went out the window with Capone and Nitti. I got the word from Downtown that the Crime Commission has become very interested in you. There have been complaints.

"You stop that crap right now or you're going to find every whorehouse, gambling joint, bookie joint, everything else, locked up tighter than a drum. You got it?"

"Okay, Tony," Giancanna replied in a placating tone. "I'll drop it."

"See that you do. There's one more thing. You've got all the guys in the Organization walk-

ing on chipped glass. They're dissatisfied with the way you're running things. You've put too much pressure on them.

"My advice to you is to level off. Call a meeting and give them assurance that you're with them. You got the point? I'm giving you one week to put your house in order or I'll take this to the Council. I don't want your answer. Just do it."

INTERNATIONAL SCENE

AT THIS TIME, in the waning days of Eisenhower's presidency, the CIA approached Robert Maheu, a former aide to Howard Hughes and ex-FBI agent, and asked him to contact some top Mafia figure and to work out a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro, the Cuban dictator.

The records, held by the FBI, suggest Maheu did contact Sam "Momo" Giancanna, addressing him as "Sam" and Giancanna corrected him by saying, "My name is Salvatore. Okay, you can call me 'Momo'. What's the proposition?"

Maheu, according to the best sources of information, outlined the CIA plot. Giancanna said he would think it over and give Maheu his answer in a week.

Roselli returned to Chicago from Los Angeles. He told Giancanna the town was locked

up. He was apathetic and a little depressed. On his way back to Chicago he had stopped off in Las Vegas hoping to see Alison Watkins but she gave him all sorts of excuses. He finally got the message.

Giancanna said, "Locked up? Whatta yah mean 'locked up'? No town is completely locked up. Who's running things?"

"Mexicans, Chinese, a lot of others. You name 'em."

Giancanna then told him about Maheu's proposition, from the CIA. "The government, Johnny—we'll have the protection of the federal government! How's that?" He was gleeful.

The significance of participation in a political assassination backed by a powerful agency of the United States Government escaped Roselli, as it did Giancanna. No matter the end result, any and all government officials would emphatically deny involvement and throw Giancanna, Roselli and anyone else who might carry out the plot to the wolves.

Neither foresaw that, in the event they agreed to the plot and carried it out successfully, sooner or later the truth would come out and a crescendo of rational voices emitting from Senate investigative bodies would probe the plot and fry everyone concerned to a crisp.



Tony Accardo

International political murders by a rival government? It was inconceivable. Yet, there it was.

Roselli agreed to go along. That was all Giancanna wanted. The first thing agreed on was to contact Richard Cain, one of the most conniving and nimble figures in the Mafia.

Cain had been connected with the Chicago Syndicate when he was a detective on the Chicago Police Force. He worked both ends, day and night, and was one of the most corrupt cops who ever wore a badge. Among his accomplishments was a fluent knowl-

edge of Spanish. Another was the fact that he would double-cross his own mother.

In discussing the project, Roselli suggested that they contact Cain. "He speaks Spanish and he knows every Spick hood in town. I'm thinking that it would be a good thing to have guys who speak Spanish do the hit. Once they got into Havana, they could pass as natives."

"Yeah, you're right. Get in touch with him."

Roselli got in touch with Cain and explained the project. Cain was dubious.

"You mean to tell me," he said, "that the CIA contacted Momo to arrange a hit on Castro. I can't believe it."

"It's true. All we have to do is give them the word we'll go along and it's all set."

"Who contacted Momo?"

"Robert Maheu."

"Maheu? You're kidding!"

"It's true."

"Count me in."

"We figure you could get some of the Spanish speaking guys you can depend on to move into Cuba to do the hit."

"Sure thing. I know them all. When do we make our move?"

"Momo will give Maheu the word and then we set things up."

"Okay, just get in touch with me the minute you get the okay."

The bizarre plot was only one of several in the machinations and shennagins that involved Roselli and Giancanna.

Prior to the CIA-Roselli-Giancanna fiasco both hoods became involved in what must be considered a disoriented alliance between class and scum.

In 1960, when John F. Kennedy was the Junior Senator from Massachusetts, he became involved with a cast of characters that no editor would buy in a story, fact or fiction, because of the mad impression of disbelief that was generated.

However, the Kennedys, John, Bobby, and Teddy, have earned a reputation for dallying with ladies outside and beyond their own families and the circle in which they moved. According to what has been revealed in the last fifteen years, none of the Kennedys were discreet in their sex lives.

The cast of characters included all three Kennedys, Peter Lawford—then a Kennedy brother-in-law—Frank Sinatra, Momo Giancanna and Johnny Roselli. Girls? There were a dozen of them. Among them was a gal named Judith Exner.

This little doxie was a real steaming number who could have given all the Las Vegas broads, who service any and all kinds of men, cards and spades

in every department. What the hell the Kennedys saw in her is beyond comprehension.

There were far more attractive girls in the party at the time assembled at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas, in a sumptuous suite. All of them were eager to please any one of the Kennedys, especially John F. who was in the midst of his campaign for the Presidency of the United States.

No one, to date, has been able to explain how a couple of notorious hoods like Giancanna and Roselli could have gotten that close to the Kennedys except, perhaps, for the fact that Giancanna was a close friend of Sinatra. And Sinatra was a close friend of John F. Kennedy.

Judith Exner told an interviewer that Sinatra had introduced her to John Kennedy. Besides being an easy-virtue broad, she is also a notorious name-dropper.

Upon being told that she had said he had introduced her to Kennedy, Sinatra snapped, "Hell hath no fury like a hustler with a literary agent."

This was at a time when Judith Exner was in negotiations with a publisher for her life story, à la Elizabeth Ray and several other ladies who play the sex game, then tell it all in their memoirs.

Judith's story was to the effect that she had had a torrid four-day romance with Kennedy in the Plaza Hotel in New York, as well as trysts with him in his Georgetown home when Jackie was out of town.

What is interesting about this statement is that, when she was having her trysts with Kennedy, she was also playing beddie-bye with Giancanna and Johnny Roselli, as well as a few others connected with the Syndicate. Her affair with Kennedy was dramatically, and suddenly, broken up when J. Edgar Hoover told the candidater, after his election to the Presidency, that Miss Exner had ties with the Mafia.

PANDORA'S BOX

ROSELLI'S ACTIVITIES, his association with Giancanna, his involvement in the plot to kill Castro, were akin to pulling the lid off Pandora's box, exposing a lot of very odd problems, not the least of them the bizarre plan to assassinate Castro.

When Giancanna and Roselli agreed to take on the hit, they made extraordinary demands on the CIA. In the meantime, Richard Cain recruited a dozen Spanish-speaking hoods in Chicago and trained them in what he believed were techniques to infiltrate Cuba,

get close to Castro and carry out the execution. He asked for a large sum of money from Giancanna, and Giancanna sent Roselli to talk with Maheu and the CIA about money.

These two hoods set up headquarters in plush suites in one of Miami Beach's most expensive hotels. They forgot all about the plot to kill Castro and devoted their time to the many parties they gave, with call-girls, young divorcées, widows and any other gals who wanted to join the lavish revelry.

Roselli went ape over another beautiful blond, who looked like Alison Watkins. She was a young married woman named Helen Ellis. He sent her flowers, baskets of fruit, gifts of one kind and another, but she refused to have anything to do with him. She kept the flowers, ate the fruit, and sent back the gifts.

Roselli decided his luck with beautiful blond divorcées and married gals was all bad. He gave his attention to the more willing and available women who attended the parties.

Richard Cain, at this time, was fired from the Chicago Police Department when he was caught spying on Mayor Daley's Commissioner of Investigations. Incredibly, he was hired in 1962 by Cook County

Sheriff Richard Ogilvie as a special deputy sheriff. Ogilvie later became Governor of Illinois.

Cain continued his spying for the Mafia after he was discharged by Ogilvie. In 1968, he was sent to prison for his part in a Mafia swindle. He was becoming a serious problem to everyone, police and Mafia alike. On December 20, 1973, two men wearing ski-masks and carrying a walkie-talkie strode into Rose's Sandwich Shop, a sleazy lunchroom, and in full view of a dozen diners, shoved a 12-gauge shotgun under Cain's chin and blew off his head.

There was a great deal of speculation as to exactly who had ordered the hit, the Fuzz or the Syndicate. During the days of Al Capone, the word around Chicago was that the certain police detectives carried out assassinations of rival mobsters for the mobs. Could be the Cain hit was ordered by the Fuzz. Yes, could be.

All was not wine and rose between Giancanna and Roselli at this time, despite the fact they were deeply involved together in the CIA-sponsored plot to kill Castro. They had agreed they would no nothing about it except spend the money the agency was supplying them.

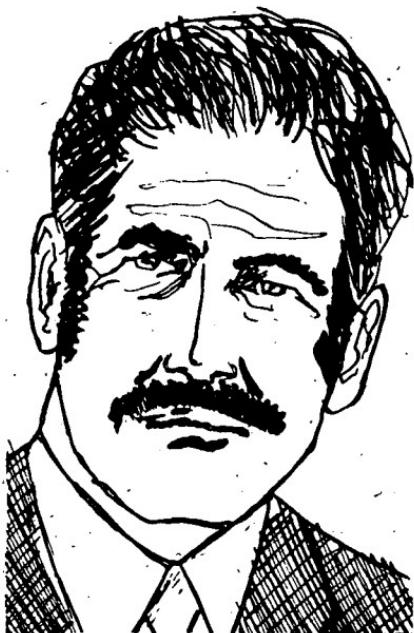
There is no denying the CIA's connection with Giancanna and

Roselli. The FBI holds documents to the effect that Roselli was the prime mover in the plot and directed all their attention to him. He was the more intelligent, the more to be trusted. Giancanna, the CIA felt, was too erratic, too unstable. However, Roselli departed from all his principles, such as they were. It was one of the factors that ultimately led to his assassination.

At this time, too, the two men became rivals for the attention of one of the most beautiful women they had ever seen. Her name was Sharrie Holland. Attention was all they were going to get from her, because she was all class and was just a little amused by the two who rivaled for her attention.

She accepted one dinner date from each and then refused to see either. Roselli blamed Giancanna for spoiling his chances with her, and Giancanna cursed Roselli for his attentions to Sharrie. Neither knew, of course, that she would have no more thought of any serious association with them than of trying to swim the Pacific Ocean.

Both called her at her hotel and, when things got to the point where she feared there would be trouble, she checked out and neither ever heard from her again. However, there



Carlo Gambino

was bitter mutual resentment.

Women, parties, wild spending—everything but attending to the Syndicate business in Chicago. Accardo finally got fed up with Giancanna. At a meeting with the Council, Giancanna was removed as head of the Chicago Syndicate and, with him, Roselli.

Giancanna went to Mexico, where he stayed for some time until the Mexican government expelled him as an undesirable alien. He returned to his home in Oak Park.

He was summoned before a grand jury in February, 1975,

and questioned about activities in Latin America. He denied any knowledge of mob action in Latin American countries. A while later, he went to Houston, Texas, and checked into the Methodist Hospital, where he underwent surgery for a gall bladder condition. He returned home and lived quietly.

However, the storm clouds were gathering about him. Somewhere in the vast labyrinth of the mobs and the CIA, by someone with authority to speak, he was marked for death. Once the mob, or those in the circle of the secret government agencies entrusted with the security aspects of the country, mark someone for extermination, there is no escape.

The intended victim may flee to the ends of the earth. He will be found. They found Giancanna in his home. His life had changed considerably. He was now without power, without any voice in mob activities. He was an outcast.

He had done nothing to satisfy the CIA that he had made any effort to carry out the contract for which he had been paid enormous sums of money. Neither had Roselli.

EXIT SAM

IT WAS JUNE 19, 1975. The bright orange sun that had

filled the sky had long ago disappeared. Now there was night, dark, starless, sinister. Inside his Oak Park home, Salvatore "Momo" Giancanna was saying good-night to the last of the guests who had gathered there for a welcome-home party.

He was hungry. He had eaten none of the food spread out on the tables for his guests, nor had he had a glass of wine in the many traditional toasts to his health. He went downstairs to the basement, where there was a large kitchen, and began to prepare a pan of Italian sausages and peppers. He was at peace with the world.

He was glad for the first time in his life to be out of the rackets, mellowed by age, despite the fact his entire life had been devoid of balance, evaluation or judgment, barren in the atmosphere of luxury that blood money had bought, he felt a serenity he had never known before.

Minutes later, two men entered, the basement where Giancanna stood over the stove. He saw the guns in their hands and a wave of panic swept over him. Then there came a fierce reaction born of his days as a hoodlum, an animal who had killed without compassion. He reached for a large knife on a nearby table.

The guns were leveled with

deliberate aim. The first shot tore into his head. His eyes still reflected his fury. More shots . . . four . . . five. They tore what had been Giancanna's brain to shreds. He lay in a grotesque heap on the floor, a puddle of blood flowing from his head, mouth and ears.

The sausages and peppers burned to ashes.

The impact of the murder of a top hood drew an immediate investigation and a roundup of underworld characters known to be hostile toward Giancanna. Where was Johnny Roselli? He couldn't be found in any of the places he frequented. No one knew where he lived.

Chicago and Oak Park police speculated that the killing was ordered by top hoods in the Syndicate, concerned that Giancanna might trade Organization secrets for immunity on a perjury charge for which he had been indicted.

Senator Frank Church of Idaho told reporters at a news conference that he was certain the CIA did not involve itself in Giancanna's death.

Tony Accardo could not be reached by either police or newsmen. Even if they had reached him, his reply, as always, would have been a shrug of his massive shoulders and the terse words, "Who knows?"

Giancanna had a simple fu-

neral. At the grave site were several detectives from the Chicago and Oak Park Homicide Divisions. The old theory that a murderer will attend the funeral of his victim didn't seem to materialize. Conspicuous by his absence was Johnny Roselli. Why hadn't Roselli attended the funeral of his friend, the man wholly responsible for his rise in the Syndicate? Fear of arrest?

The storm clouds were gathering over Roselli. He had been deeply involved in the plot to kill Castro, and had, as the mobs view it, double-crossed the CIA along with Giancanna. He had taken hundreds of thousands of dollars, lived like an Arab prince, done nothing in return. The underworld grapevine now was to the effect that the CIA had ordered the hit on Giancanna and let out a contract on Roselli. All this talk may have been a blind to take the heat off the Syndicate.

To counteract this, former CIA Director Richard M. Helms declared flatly at a press conference, "I do not know of any foreign leader that was ever assassinated by the CIA. This statement was hurled at a Washington newsman who questioned him.

Helms further blew his cool to yell at CBS's Daniel Schorr, since discharged by that net-

work for selling or handing over without pay information to the *Voice*, a newspaper printed in Greenwich Village, New York, calling Schorr a sonofabitch and a killer. Helms' statement has to be considered as no more than an artful technical denial.

Although it is possibly true that no American CIA official ever actually murdered a foreign leader there is plentiful proof to suggest that foreign nationals, employed by the CIA, have made attempts to assassinate, sometimes with success, key figures overseas, acting on orders from Washington.

During the time he held office as Vice-President of the United States, Nelson Rockefeller's investigation of the Castro plot also revealed plots linking the CIA to assassination schemes against the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo, killed May 30, 1961, and Viet Nam's Ngo Din Diem, shot to death November 2, 1968.

At all odds while there is some doubt that the CIA was behind the plot to kill Castro, there is none that Johnny Roselli was up to his ears in it, actually the front man, even though Robert Maheu contacted Giancanna first . . . and Giancanna had artfully turned the deal over to Roselli.

Roselli now was hunted.

He knew it as surely as day follows night. What he didn't know was the identity of his assigned killers and of whoever had ordered the hit—the CIA or the Syndicate? The Syndicate had its own good reason for wanting Roselli dead. Like Giancanna, he knew too much. The Syndicate will protect itself against anyone who represents a threat to the safety of the organization, man or woman, politician or newsman.

The Syndicate killed Jake Lingle, a Chicago Tribune reporter who doublecrossed them. They killed Janice Drake, a onetime Miss America contestant. She and her hoodlum friend Anthony Carfano, better known as "Little Augie" Pisano, were shot to death on September 29, 1959, near La Guardia airport as they sat in Carfano's Cadillac and waited to keep an appointment.

The Syndicate also killed Nancy Sue Shelton to keep her from talking to a grand jury about a dope ring run by Carlo Gambino. She vanished from the face of the earth sometime in 1964. Another was Patsy Parks, a beauteous model who played around with dope racketeers. She was stabbed to death, her body soaked with gasoline and set ablaze. There were others. One who escaped death was Sina Gallo, bride of

"Crazy Joe" Gallo. Gunmen walked into Umberto's Clam House in Greenwich Village and perforated Crazy Joe with a dozen slugs while she looked on in horror, screaming hysterically. The killers marked her for death because she could identify them. At this writing, she is still alive but no one knows where she lives or with whom.

If anyone knew how thoroughly underworld hoods carry out a contract, it was Johnny Roselli. Where to go? Where to hide? Who were his enemies? Who were his friends?

In recent years, Syndicate killers wasted James "Jimmy Doyle" Plumeri, who ran the rackets in New York's Garment District for forty years. He was strangled with his own silk necktie in September, 1971. His murder remains unsolved as are the others. Thomas "Tommy Ryan" Eboli, a long-time Gambino associate, was gunned down on July 16, 1972. Roselli knew this all too well. He knew, too, that his number was up. No place was safe.

Flee to Italy, to Sicily, to London, Africa, to hell—it didn't make any difference. He began to move, fast. He went back to Las Vegas, checked into the Moulin Rouge Hotel, away from the glittering Strip, on Las Vegas' West Side. It was a

very quiet and reserved hotel on Bonanza Avenue.

A Mafia figure talked a little out of turn one night in a Chicago cocktail lounge to an associate. He said, "Roselli is dead. Wherever he is, he is as good as dead." The loose-tongued speaker, overheard by the bartender, reported it to someone in the mob. The offender of the Code disappeared and has not been heard from since.

The syndicate has its spies, stoolies, informers, everywhere, just as the FBI and police officers in every city have them. At the Moulin Rouge, Roselli lived quietly, had his meals in his room, sat quietly by the pool, avoided any and all conversations with other guests and became the mystery man of the hotel. No one knew who he really was and the hotel staff, those who did know, would not give out information.

The dull routine of his days began to wear on Roselli. He grew tired of gazing at the hills beyond the hotel, at the lights of the Strip, which he could see from his suite. He imagined the revelry that was going on in the hotels, the gambling, the shows, the beautiful women, available and willing. He had been a night person all of his adult life. Now, he was a self-imposed prisoner. He had no

place to go, no place to hide.

He wanted to see Alison Watkins. Maybe she had changed her mind about him. He knew, however, that to venture into a Strip Hotel; any hotel, would be fatal. Someone was certain to recognize him and send word to whoever held the contract on him. The price on his head had to be high.

He decided to check out of the Moulin Rouge and go to Fort Lauderdale to live with a sister. Her home was in a quiet residential neighborhood, where he was sure he would be safe until he could straighten out the situation. There had to be someone, two—three men on the Council, who would front for him and have the contract cancelled. More than anything else, he wanted peace of mind, security, a lessening of the strain of being hunted.

CURTAIN CALL

ABOUT A WEEK AFTER he checked out of the Moulin Rouge, two well-dressed men in their late twenties or early thirties came to the hotel. On duty behind the desk was Michael Ellis, the assistant manager.

The taller of the two said, "We're friends of Mr. John Roselli. Can you tell us the number of his room?"

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Roselli checked out more than a week ago."

The two men exchanged significant glances.

"He left a forwarding address, of course, didn't he?"

"No, he didn't. He just checked out."

"How about his registration card. He filled one out, didn't he?"

Ellis regarded the two men suspiciously. "I'm sorry, but it is against hotel policy. Are you police officers?"

The shorter man smiled. "No, we're not. We're friends of Mr. Roselli. We have some important papers for him to sign. We know he travels around a lot, but he does have a home base. That should be listed on his registration."

"Could be, but you'll have to talk with Mr. Leonard Roy. He's the owner. If he says okay, I'll show you the registration."

"Where is Mr. Roy?" the taller man asked.

"He went downtown but should be back shortly. You can wait for him if you like." He pointed to chairs in the lobby. "Those are comfortable."

The two men took the chairs. While they were waiting for the owner, and with Ellis' back to them, Babara Sanders, the housekeeper, came by with some towels on her way to a

room. The taller man got up from his chair and followed her down the corridor.

"Miss?"

Barbara Sanders turned. "Yes?" She was an attractive woman and the man smiled at her.

"You're one of the maids?"

"The housekeeper."

"Housekeeper?" He smiled again. "You should be in one of the Strip hotel shows."

"That's very flattering but I can't dance and I can't sing and I'm busy. What is it you want?"

He took a hundred-dollar bill from his pocket and put it in her hand. She gave him a quizzical look, misunderstanding the reason for the gift.

He shook his head. "Only information. My friend, Mr. John Roselli, lived here. He checked out. I have to locate him. Someone as attractive as you, Mr. Roselli must have talked with you—asked you to dinner—or something."

"Yes, he talked with me, but not about dinner, and not about 'something', as you put it. Take back your money."

"Oh, no—you keep it. Look, Miss—what's your name?"

"Barbara Sanders."

"Miss Sanders, did my friend tell you where he was going when he checked out?"

"Yes. He said he was going back home. I think he once said

he was from Chicago. I assume that's where he went."

"Chicago, eh?"

"He didn't say. I assume that's where he went." She fingered the bill. "Do you want this back since I'm not much help?"

"No, no. You keep it. Buy yourself something." He gave her an appraising glance. "Something for that figure." He smiled and walked away.

A half-hour later, Leonard Roy, the owner returned. He was a tall man with piercing eyes. Ellis pointed to the two men. Roy walked to where they sat.

"I'm Leonard Roy. You want to see me?"

The two rose. The taller one said, "Yes, Mr. Roy. We're friends of Mr. John Roselli. We were to meet him here but we've been told he checked out about a week ago."

"That's true."

"Since he travels around a lot, we don't know how to locate him. We thought his hotel registration card might reveal his home base. We'd like to have your permission to look at it."

"No, I can't do that. However, I'll do this. I'll check it and give you the information."

"That'll be just fine."

Roy went behind the desk, pulled out a drawer, checked through some cards, pulled one

out. He said, "The address he listed is 2200 South Michigan Boulevard, Chicago. That's it, gentlemen."

The two looked at each other. The address was that of the Old Lexington Hotel, Capone's headquarters. They thanked Roy and walked out.

"Whatta you make of those two?" Ellis asked.

"Trouble." Roy shrugged. "Well, I don't believe that address meant anything to them anyway, from the expressions on their faces. That's not our problem since Mr. Roselli is no longer a guest here."

In Fort Lauderdale, at his sister's home, Roselli felt no more secure than in Las Vegas. The tension was building. Hoods came to Florida in droves, from every city. They come to Miami Beach, to Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale, along the Galt Ocean Mile, where many luxury hotels were located.

There are restaurants in each section, cocktail lounges inside the hotels, around the pools, just lounges. In any one of these places someone was certain to be there who know him. But he couldn't live pent up. He had been convicted in 1969 of a card-cheating scandal in the Friar's Club in Los Angeles and sentenced to five years in prison. It all but broke him both

emotionally and spiritually.

A prison cell, the slammer, as prisoners refer to it, held terrors for him. Taking Roselli by and large, he was no angel. He had been arrested sixteen times on charges of carrying a concealed weapon. He was usually fined or the charge dismissed on technicalities, not unusual in Chicago.

The Fort Lauderdale police are a little touchy on the subject of out-of-state or local hoods walking the streets; armed. Two of the detectives, Sergeant David Patterson and "Smooth" Wilson, learned that Roselli was in town along with rumors to the effect that he was marked for execution. They were a couple of sharp cops and tried to avoid trouble before it happened rather than afterward. They learned that Roselli was living with his sister and paid him a friendly visit.

Detective Patterson said, "Johnny, we don't want any trouble from you. You're a hot package. That's our information. Maybe you know it, maybe you don't. If you don't, take it from us."

Roselli stared at the two detectives with somber eyes. "Okay, what do you want me to do?"

"Well, for one thing," Detective Wilson said, "we don't

want you going around town, packing a heater. This isn't Chicago."

"Okay, I'll buy that. What else?"

Sergeant Patterson said, "If what we've heard is true, I would suggest that you make a real strong effort to take the contract off yourself, see the right people. If we got the word about you, then you can bet the guys looking for you have it too. We're in no position to give you protection. Even if we wanted to, our boss wouldn't okay it.

"You've got a long yellow sheet for one thing. For another, we've had no formal word from anyone that you're on the spot. That's it. You're on your own. Frankly, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes for a million dollars."

"Okay, thanks for the information."

"It's for free, on the house, because we don't want any gang killings. This is a tourist city. We want to keep it clean."

When the detectives left, Roselli called Chicago. Tony Accardo? No answer. Detroit—one of the Zerellis. No answer. New York—Carlo Gambino's lieutenant, Giovanni Bartoli. No answer. Roselli got the message. Hands off. Who had let out the contract on him? Who had enough clout to be able to

order every Don across the country to refuse help? What puzzled him more thany anything else was *WHY*? What had been his mortal sin?

He thought about the CIA. If they had ordered the hit, they were strong enough to send out the word that helping Roselli would bring reprisals. He couldn't buy that. A federal agency ordering a hit on a local hood? Still . . .

He was doomed. It was just a matter of time. Today, tomorrow, next week . . . He put a short-barreled gun in a holster and fixed it to his belt, then went out.

In the years he had been connected with the Syndicate, he had learned that one man with a gun, marked for death, was in a hopeless position. To assure the hit, there usually were four men—or five. The harsh Code of the Underworld, the Syndicate, the Mafia, the Organization, call it what you will, it added up to the same thing. Cross it, doublecross it, and no appeal.

Johnny Roselli didn't get too far from his sister's home. A car was behind him, one in front—two men from each car, four guns trained on him. He was hustled into one of their cars after being disarmed, with a man on either side of him, men he didn't know. Talk?

What could he say? Nothing.

"Who wants to talk to me?" he asked.

All he got for an answer were hard stares. He tried again, got the same. He had been a negotiator, a persuader, a mediator. He began to talk, to rationalize, then to plead. It was no use. They were deaf to all he said. The contract was irrevocable.

He was killed, strangled, his body put into the oil drum after holes had been drilled in it to be sure it would stay down in Biscayne Bay. He was killed without ever learning why or who his executioners were.

Several days later the barrel came to the surface with Johnny Roselli's body.

Detective Sergeant David Patterson and Detective Smooth Wilson joined Homicide detectives in the investigation. Weeks of work led up blind alleys.

In December, 1976, Richard A. Sprague, staff director of the House Assassinations Committee, planned a thorough investigation of Salvatore Giancanna and Johnny Roselli to learn if their deaths were linked to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King. Sprague said the panel would explore the relationship between President Kennedy and

the two dead mobster chiefs.

Six-and-a-half million dollars a year were appropriated for the inquiry. The panel will also investigate one dead man, Lee Harvey Oswald, and one prisoner, James Earl Ray. Oswald can't talk. James Earl Ray can. But will he? And, if he does, what will he say? What can he say?

Two top Mafioso are slain Underworld-style and a former Philadelphia prosecutor, Richard A. Sprague, becomes head of a government agency with six-and-a-half million dollars to look into their killing. All he would have to do is offer five hundred thousand dollars for the names of the assassins to anyone and both murders will be solved. If there had been any kind of tieup between President Kennedy and Giancanna and Roselli, it would have surfaced long ago.

Giancanna was killed while the Senate Intelligence Committee tried to arrange for him to testify about the Castro plot. A wild goose chase. Everyone in all the mobs, and the news media, knew that Giancanna and Roselli did nothing but spend the CIA money, as did Richard Cain. Roselli did answer questions put to him by the committee but was not asked about possible links to the Kennedy assassination.

Taking it by and large, the Syndicate fears anyone who is called to testify before a federal committee. Giancanna had for some time become a nuisance to the Syndicate. Elimination is the only solution. Roselli? He had been close to Giancanna and had testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee behind closed doors.

Things are quiet on the Syndicate front these days, which is how they want it. Mr. Sprague can call all the witnesses he wants to, as can the newly formed Assassinations Committee. They will get noth-

ing more than what has already been learned by the Warren Committee.

This committee worked exhaustively to determine just who, if anybody, was tied in with Harvey Lee Oswald, and learned that only Oswald himself, a psycho, was involved. James Earl Ray pleaded guilty. The Warren Commission and James Earl Ray solved the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King—it says in the record.

Giancanna and Roselli? As Tony Accardo would say:
Who Knows?

MIKE SHAYNE Presents**Next Month's Headliners****A LADY TO KILL by BRETT HALLIDAY***The New Mike Shayne Novelet***THE APOSTLE MURDERS by CAROLE OTTIFY GRILLION***A Terrifying Short Novel***ALONE AT LAST by ANITA ZELMAN***A New Novelet*



PURE ROTTEN

by JOHN LUTZ

Her real name was Imogene, but everyone knew her as "Pure Rotten"—even her kidnappers as well.

MAY 25, 7:00 A. M. Telephone call to Clark Forthcue, Forthcue mansion, Long Island.

Mr. Forthcue, don't talk, listen. Telephone calls can be traced easy, letters can't be. This will be the only telephone call and it will be short. We have your stepdaughter Imogene, who will be referred to in typed correspondence as Pure Rotten, a name that fits a ten year old spoiled rich brat like this one.

For more information check the old rusty mailbox in front of the deserted Garver farm at the end of Wood Road near your property. Check it tonight. Check it every night. Tell the police or anyone else besides your wife about this and the kid dies. We'll know. We mean business.

Click.
Buzz.

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.

May 25

Dear Mr. Forthcue:

Re our previous discussion on Pure Rotten: It will cost you exactly one million dollars for the return of the merchandise unharmed. We have researched and we know this is well within your capabilities. End the agony you and your wife are going through. Give us your answer by-letter. We will check the Garver mailbox sometime after ten tomorrow evening. Your letter had better be there.

Sincerely,
A. Snatcher

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.

May 26

Mr. Snatcher:

Do not harm Pure Rotten. I have not contacted the authorities and do not intend to do so. Mrs. Forthcue and I will follow your instructions faithfully. But your researchers have made an error. I do not know if one million dollars is within my capabilities and it will take me some time to find out. Be assured that you have my complete cooperation in this matter. Of course if some harm should come to Pure Rotten, this cooperation would abruptly cease.

Anxiously,
Clark Forthcue

Dear. Mr. Forthcue:

Come off it. We know you can come up with the million. But in the interest of that cooperation you mentioned we are willing to come down to \$750,000 for the return of Pure Rotten. It will be a pleasure to get this item off our hands, *one way or the other.*

Determinedly,
A. Snatcher

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.

May 27

Dear Mr. Snatcher:

I write this letter in the quietude of my veranda, where, for the first time in years, it is tranquil enough for me to think clearly, so I trust I am dealing with this matter correctly. By lowering your original figure by twenty-five percent you have shown yourselves to be reasonable men, with whom an equally reasonable man might negotiate. Three quarters of a million is, as I'm sure you are aware, a substantial sum of money. Even one in my position does not raise that much on short notice without also raising a few eyebrows and some suspicion. Might you consider a lower sum?

Reasonably,
Clark Forthcue

Dear Mr. Forthcue:

Pure rotten is a perishable item and a great inconvenience to store. In fact, live explosives might be a more manageable commodity for our company to handle. In light of this we accede to your request for a lower figure by dropping our fee to \$500,000, delivered immediately. This is our final figure. It would be easier, in fact a pleasure, for us to dispose of this commodity and do business elsewhere.

Still determinedly,
A. Snatcher

* * *
Snatchers, Inc.
May 29

Dear Mr. Snatcher:

This latest lowering of your company's demands is further proof that I am dealing with intelligent and realistic individuals.

Of course my wife has been grieving greatly over the loss, however temporary, of Pure Rotten, though with the aid of new furs and jewelry she has recovered from similar griefs. When one marries a woman, as in acquiring a company, one must accept the liabilities along with the assets. With my rapidly improving nervous condition, as my own initial

grief and anxiety subside somewhat, I find myself at odds with my wife and of the opinion that your \$500,000 figure is outrageously high. Think more in terms of tens of thousands.

Regards,
Clark Forthcue

* * *

Forthcue:

Ninety thousand is it! *Final!* By midnight tomorrow in the Garver mailbox, or Pure Rotten will be disposed of. You are keeping us in an uncomfortable position and we don't like it. We are not killers, but we can be.

A. Snatcher

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.
May 30

Dear Mr. Snatcher:

Free after many years of the agonizing pain of my ulcer, I can think quite objectively on this matter. Though my wife demands that I pay ransom, ninety thousand dollars is out of the question. I suggest you dispose of the commodity under discussion as you earlier intimated you might. After proof of this action, twenty thousand dollars will

accompany my next letter in the Garver mailbox. Since I have been honest with you and have not contacted the authorities, no one, including my wife, need know the final conclusion of our transaction.

Cordially,
Clark Forthcue

* * *

Forthcue:

Are you crazy? This is a human life. We are not killers. But you are right about one thing—no amount of money is worth more than your health. Suppose we return Pure Rotten unharmed tomorrow night? Five thousand dollars for our trouble and silence will be plenty.

A. Snatcher

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.
May 31

Dear Mr. Snatcher:

After due reflection I must unequivocally reject your last suggestion and repeat my own suggestion that you dispose of the matter at hand in your own

fashion. I see no need for further correspondence in this matter.

Clark Forthcue

* * *

Snatchers, Inc.
June 1

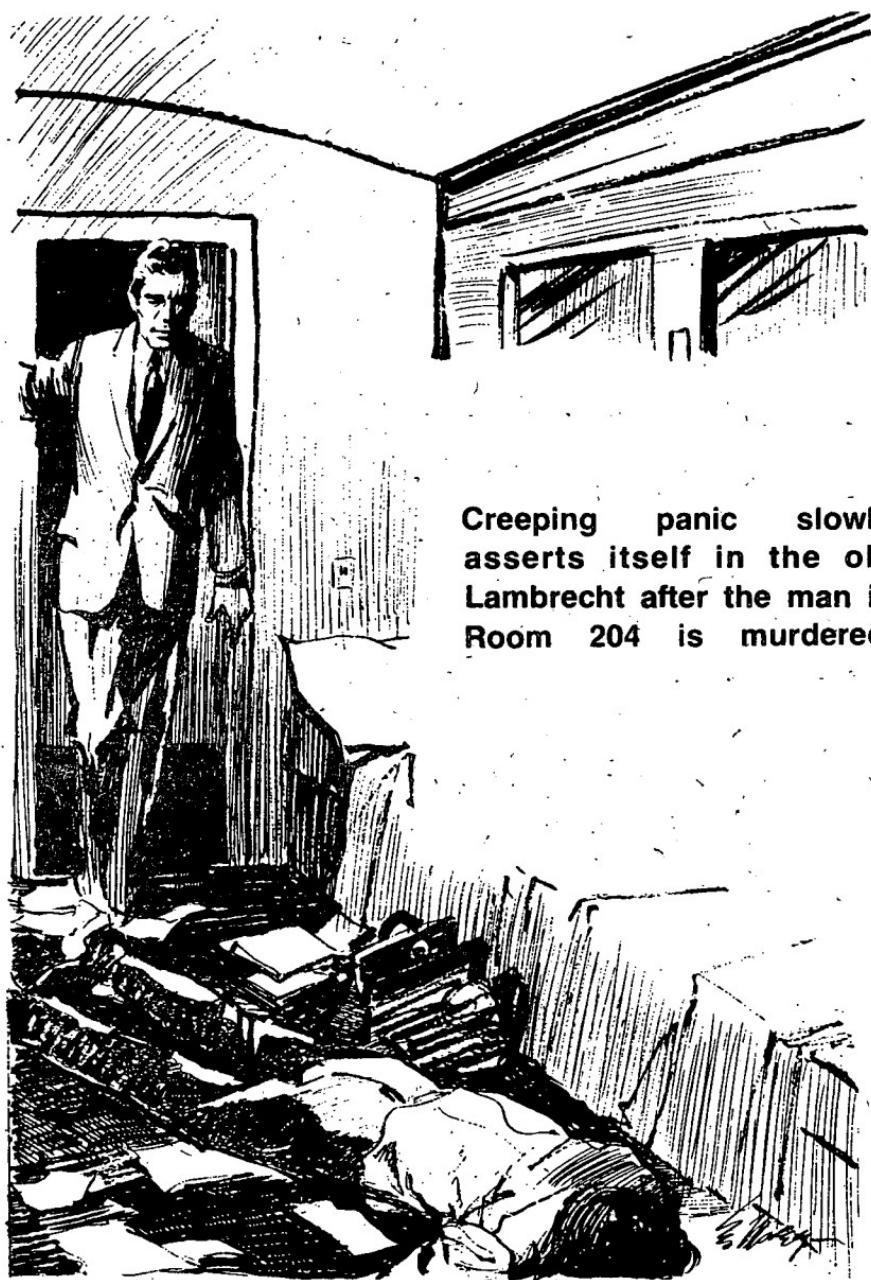
Clark Forthcue:

There has been a take over of the bord of Snatcher, Inc. and my too vise presidents who haven't got a choice agree with me, the new president. I have all the carbon copy's of Snatchers, Inc. letters to you and all your letters back to us. The law is very severe with kidnappers and even more seveer with people who want to kill kids.

But the law is not so seveer with kids, in fact will forgive them for almost anything if it is there first ofense. If you don't want these letters given to the police you will leave \$500,000 tomorrow night in Garvers old mailbox. I meen it. Small bils is what we want but some fiftys and hundreds will be o. k.

Sincerely,
Pure Rotten





Creeping panic slowly asserts itself in the old Lambrecht after the man in Room 204 is murdered.

Death In A Small Hotel

by WILHELMINA RAISBECK

THE FIRST WINTER Emma and I turned the farm over to the boys and moved into town I bumped around in a bungalow not big enough to whip a cat in, feeling useless and lumpy; snapping at Emma knowing full well she'd snap right back. It got so bad one snowy day that I buckled on my galoshes, walked into town and found a job.

Our little western town is growing fast, but the heart of downtown is still centered in the old Lambrecht Hotel. For some months Mr. Griffin, the assistant manager who doubles as cashier of the coffee shop, had also been doubling as elevator boy, mostly because with the wage they could afford to pay they couldn't find a boy hungry enough. The money

didn't bother me. I only wanted shut of that bungalow.

That's when my new life began. Something interesting was always going on at the hotel. Hardly a day went by that I didn't have a bit of news to bring home to Emma, and that made the evening for her. To tell the truth it made the evening for me in the telling. Sometimes she'd get all fired up and say, "You ought to write a book, Angie. Go on, put that down on paper."

Once I tried. It was just a little happening. I sat there staring at the sheet of paper until I near nibbled that pencil to a nub. Maybe I can work it in now, but first let me tell you about our hotel.

It's a homey place. Mr. Sanderson, the manager, had

modernized it a bit, fighting the old fight against the competition of new motels. He'd let out the front of the lobby to a florist, who gussied up the big window with flowering plants, azaleas, mums. Just around the corner of my elevator was the fridge where the cut flowers were kept. Most of the time Harold spent making up wreaths for funerals, bouquets for weddings and those little corsages.

I got to know Harold pretty well. We talked while he fooled around with his flowers and I sat waiting for someone to need the elevator. Mostly I talked—he listened.

One thing jarred me about him—he called me "pops". Not that I'm not old enough to be almost anybody's father. But not Harold's. He's gray, and his clothes hang loose and sloppy making him look bigger, and rounder in the shoulders than he really is.

Across from my elevator is the cutaway entrance to the coffee shop, the hub of activity, with shoppers and tradespeople stopping in for a bite, kids piling in from high school for refreshments. Mr. Sanderson keeps an overgrown fern in the coffee shop window for show. Cozy. With the mouth-watering smells and the waitresses bustling around—nice.

Between my elevator and the

coffee shop is the cashier's counter with things to sell, little candies done up in foil, cigars, and Mr. Griffin sitting there waiting for Mr. Sanderson to retire or dry up and blow away. It's my personal opinion he isn't about to do either.

Mr. Sanderson is a wiry little man, strung up like a bow fiddle, who keeps rubbing his hands together, brisk and business-like. He'd taken to wearing a flower in his lapel, part of the modernizing program, and he'd mingle with the guests and laugh a lot. You couldn't help but like the little fellow.

"Angie," he'd say to me. "the success of any business depends upon the morale of the employees." He tried hard to make us all happy.

To the right of the lobby, past the magazine racks and the television set and the clerk's desk with pretty Miss Fleming checking the guests in and out, is a carpeted stairway to the second floor. At one time or another almost all of us go up those stairs to use the public john.

Before I go into the murder, I want to tell you about this incident that happened, the one I started to write about. I don't know when I first began to notice that an awful lot of men,

young and old, were coming in off the street and going up those stairs. They all walked with that easy couldn't-careless-swing, and some were buttoning their jackets coming down.

All of which made me look twice at the pretty young lady who occupied room 202. She was flashy and always dolled up. By putting two and two together I arrived at an obvious conclusion. I was afraid to tell Emma about it at the time because I knew what she'd say. "Oh the poor little thing! Why don't you have a talk with her, Angie?"

I wasn't about to do that. To tell the truth, the little lady wasn't my concern. Mr. Sanderson was. The hotel was his whole life. Being a widower and childless, he was fiercely proud of it.

So when I saw his eyes begin to slide after those men sauntering up the stairs and back again I held my breath and sweated. Sure enough, after about the fourth in one day, Mr. Sanderson bounded up the stairs, and that afternoon the lady checked out.

I thought he handled it well, except that he went around muttering to one and all that we might be getting pushed by the motels, but by God we weren't going to become one of

those places. That didn't help the morale one bit.

This Tuesday morning in June, I was sitting in my chair, waiting for someone to need the elevator. Harold was puttering among his pots. Mr. Griffin was clangng at the cash register. Things were peaceful when a blood-curdling scream sounded on the second floor.

From nowhere, Mr. Sanderson was in the middle of the lobby, running to the stairs, with me, Harold, Mr. Griffin and sundry following. We were stopped at the bottom by Sarah, the charwoman, who came flying down, still screaming.

"Sarah!" Mr. Sanderson said sharply. But she just stood there with her tongue vibrating. "Sarah, please," he said. Then, "Please!"

That didn't stop her either. I looked around at the others, wide eyed and rooted to the carpet. They seemed disinclined to action. So I reached out a beefy hand, clutched Sarah's shoulder and dug in deep. She stopped.

Then, "Blood!" she screeched. "Godamighty blood! That man in two-o-four is dead as a mackerel!"

Mr. Sanderson closed his eyes and took a deep breath, while Mr. Griffin started beelining it up the stairs. "Stop!" Mr. Sanderson yelled. "No one goes

up those stairs. Everyone get back to work."

- That stopped the lot of us. Then, calm as you please, Mr. Sanderson asked Miss Fleming to phone the police. There was only a slight buckling in his walk to let you know his little straw legs were shaking hard inside their pants.

Within minutes, the place was jammed with cops. With Mr. Sanderson snapping at us, business kept rolling, Mr. Griffin at his cash register, Harold at his pots, me busy hauling policemen and cameramen up to the second floor.

I knew Sid Hatfield, one of the uniformed men, personally. Besides being the policeman who checked out the hotel regularly, his daddy had a farm near mine and he was raised with my boys, even went to agricultural college a couple of years with my Jody before he got interested in police work. I knew Sid would have no trouble getting the cooperation of the waitresses, being tanned with pearly white teeth and single.

Once, when I took a load of men up, I stepped into the hall. The door of 204 was open and the sun coming through made a bright shaft in the dimness. I could hear the men talking and moving around in there. With just a little imagination, I could

see Mr. Mosier lying dead on the bed, and darned if I couldn't smell the blood.

That set me to thinking about Mr. Mosier. Later, when they carried the stretcher into the elevator and I felt him close in there with the sheet high over the mound of his belly, I thought of him some more.

After the cameramen, the coroner and all had been hauled down and the policemen started milling around questioning the employees, Sid came up to me. "Where can we have some privacy?" he asked, stepping into the elevator.

I took us up to the second floor and put the stop on the elevator. There's a short foyer there with a window looking down on the alley. Directly in front of the elevator is a bench with a dark picture hanging above it of a woman with a vase.

"I gotta stay where I can hear the buzzer," I explained, as we sat down.

"Well, Angie," he began. There was a time he called me Mr. Ferrel or Jody's papa, but I felt comfortable with "Angie". "What can you tell me about this Mr. Mosier?"

"Nothing much, Sid," I said. "He's been coming here regularly once a month with all that jewelry. I don't think it's worth anything. He just ped-

dled it to the ladies of the town and then they had parties to sell it—like Tupperware. I think all they got out of it was some pieces of jewelry for themselves."

Sid nodded as though he already knew this and flicked the ashes of his cigarette into the standing ashtray. Then he asked if I remember bringing anyone in particular up or down with him.

Mr. Mosier was always alone, I told him, adding that I suspected he made the bars at night and slipped back in after the elevator was closed because of a morning you could smell his breath above the shaving lotion. Kind of a sad fat man, a loner.

Next he wanted to know who I took down the elevator earlier this morning, which happened to be one elderly couple bound for Yellowstone, and then who went up and down the stairs.

"The stairs?" I said. "Lord, Sid, everybody goes up the stairs to use the john."

"Mr. Mosier was stabbed about one hour before we got here. A list, Angie. Who did you see from your elevator?"

I reeled off the names.

"Those are all employees, I gather. No guests up or down? No one off the streets?"

"Not that I could see this morning."



"Not like the traffic the time the hooker tried to set up shop here?"

"You heard about her?"

Sid grinned and nodded. "Mr. Sanderson was plenty riled, I understand."

"Yes, he was," I said. "He takes a lot of pride in his hotel."

"Enough pride to kill a man who might be using his hotel for illegal purposes?"

"Hey, whoa there," I said. "Not Mr. Sanderson."

"Why not? Because he's your friend?"

"He wouldn't kill a man in the first place, and he sure wouldn't here and spoil the good name of his hotel."

"Mosier was stabbed many times. Someone was crazy mad. When anger takes over like that, a person isn't thinking. Here, Angie, let me show you something." He reached in his

pocket, drew out a packet and handed it to me.

"What's this?" I asked.

"What's it look like?"

It was a sealed plastic bag. Inside were bright coils of copper. I pressed my finger against the bag and traced an outline of the coils. "Looks like those chains ladies wear around their neck with something usually dangling from it."

"Right. Usually a pendant of some sort. Lots of these chains were found. We're fairly certain they once held pendants and that the chains were left behind when the pendants were taken because of their bulk."

"Then the pendants were valuable?" I asked.

"Yes—in one way or another. There are two possible motives here. One is theft of those pendants, which could be anyone. The other is a motive only Mr. Sanderson would have, rage at the threat of damage to the reputation of his hotel. Angie, I want your memory jogged good. You were there at your elevator while Mosier was being stabbed. If something out of the way should occur to you—anything—I want to hear about it. Understand?"

Sid left me with a lot to chew on. Mr. Mosier had showed me a handful of his jewelry once. Junk. Now we had valuable pendants? Next, my mind slipped

ped to recalling how each one looked going up and down those stairs—Mr. Sanderson, Harold, Mr. Griffin, the cook, the waitresses. No one stood out as a person who'd just stabbed a man. The rest of the day, I kept my eye out for the comings and goings, all the while trying to raise a memory that lay stretched out flat.

That night, after closing the elevator, I had to take my turn at being frisked by the police before I could go home.

The next morning I was standing around with a group of employees, listening to them nurse their indignities at being frisked, all of us ignoring the watchful eye of a policeman, when Mr. Sanderson came breezing in.

"Break it up," he said, then to me, "Take me up, Angie."

At the second floor, he said, "Here, Angie. I want a word with you." He stepped into the foyer, and for a minute he just stood there, staring at that gloomy picture of the lady and the vase. Finally he blurted out, "God, how I hate that picture!"

I nodded to show I agreed with him. He sat down then and all of a sudden he crumpled and buried his face in his hands. I eased down alongside him. It's the first time I've seen him completely still. He just sat

there with his hands covering his face.

"Are they going through the rooms up here? I asked for want of something better to say.

He lifted his head. "Like a cyclone. Oh Angie, what's going to become of this hotel? First prostitution, then murder. It's been such a nice little place."

His head moved around in my direction. "Do you know what I like best about it? It's the businessmen carrying their briefcases up to use our conference room. You know how they order coffee and keep the lines busy making those long-distance calls. It makes you feel part of a bigger world somehow."

He turned back to face the gaping elevator, and I kept quiet to let him dream out loud at his pleasure.

"It's the ladies too who come in their finery to open up the Sapphire room for their parties and their club meetings. That's the pretty side of life, Angie. Not this—prostitution, murder, worse still now, heroin."

"Heroin?" I asked surprised. "In those missing pendants?"

"Sid told you about those?" When I nodded he went on. "Yes, they found particles on one of those chains. The police have been trying to get at the source supplying some of our

high school kids and they think this is it. They've deduced little packets of heroin are in the pendants, wherever they are, and that someone, probably the pusher, killed for those packets."

"The police will find out who," I said to encourage him. "And then things will be the same again."

He shook his head, denying me. "No. Things will never be the same. "Oh Angie!" he wailed. "Why here?" All at once his arms shot out with his hands clinched and his head dropped near to his chest. "In God's name, *why here!*"

I didn't know the answer, and I sure didn't want to hang around to see a man weep, no more than Mr. Sanderson would want me to, so I left him and stepped into the elevator and went down. *Why here?* I mulled that over. Why not one of the new motels where a man selling costume jewelry could have all the pushers coming in with no one the wiser. Why here, where everyone coming and going is noticed? You can see how the idea rolled around in my head and came up clear that the pusher had to be one of our own employees, a regular and someone who could go up to use that john any time he pleased.

It was a sickening idea

That day ended and the next one began and ended much the same way, with policemen milling all around questioning everybody, ransacking rooms, frisking us coming and going.

There was a noticeable change by now among the employees—no more gathering in groups to grumble and air complaints. Everyone was tight-lipped, suspicious. It was plain the morale was shot to hell.

The pressure was telling on Mr. Sanderson. The first day he forgot to get a fresh flower for his lapel. The one left there drooped in a pitiful way, showing to all exactly how it felt. The next day it was gone altogether.

And another thing—Mr. Sanderson had always been overly anxious about his health. He'd take pills for little aches most of us wave away. Now he was always reaching in his pocket for something to gulp. He was the one the police collared most and I watched him getting edgier and edgier, wondering when he would fly apart.

On this particular morning I was sitting at my post, eyeing Mr. Sanderson and Sid, who were talking together, when Mr. Sanderson reached in his pocket and pulled out a little box. By the way he was work-

ing the lid, I could tell it was aspirin. He ran a finger around inside the box, then closed it and put it back in his pocket. Empty.

A little while later he pulled it out and went through the whole thing again, the while answering the questions Sid was putting to him. My head started to ache just thinking how his must feel. So I mosied over to the cashier's desk to ask Mr. Griffin if he kept aspirin. He looked over his stock and said that Mr. Sanderson must have bought him out.

I thought first about running out to the drug store. I could ask Harold to mind the elevator. Heaven knows, I took orders for him often enough while he was out making his deliveries. But on second thought I couldn't be lucky enough to get past the policeman manning the door without a frisk, and I didn't want to suffer it.

So I walked over to Mr. Sanderson, interrupted Sid and asked if he had aspirin in his rooms. "I don't know, Angie," he said. "Suppose you look." And he handed me his key.

I've been in Mr. Sanderson's rooms often enough, but never alone. He liked to have some of us in once in a while to talk shop, mostly for company, I think. We'd just sit around and

have a few beers and talk. He was a good talker, memorized jokes things like that.

But there in the daytime, it was lonesome, with the sun coming through the glass curtains and the unmade bed and cigarette stubs in the ashtrays. I went to the bathroom and looked in the medicine cabinet, which was packed tight with prescription bottles, gargles and the like, but no aspirin.

On my way back out, I stopped and thought how it would be to call this home, just plainness with no tie-back curtains or family pictures and the bed mussed only on one side. I wandered over to the sofa and saw on the coffee table, along with cigarette stubs, two beer cans that had been smashed in. I had a strong feeling for the little fellow whose fists had done that.

I ambled over to the window and looked down at the tip of the hotel sign below, thinking of him sitting alone at night, with that sign flicking red, smoking cigarettes and giving way to his frustrations by bashing in beer cans. Before I left the room, I had made up my mind.

Downstairs, I went to Harold and said, "Hey, you keep cards to go with our flowers around here some place, don't you?"

"Yeah," he said, drawing two

white gladiolas from the fridge.

"Well, I've been thinking. It's mean, us adding to Mr. Sanderson's miseries by not hanging together. He puts a lot of stock in the morale of his employees. And he's been mighty good to us . . ."

I was winding up my sales pitch but already Harold was moving his broad heavy face up and down, like he knew what I was getting at.

I told him my plan. "I am going to take one of those cards around the make every last one of them sign it. Then we'll write something like, 'We're with you, boss,' and take it up to his room with some flowers."

"Gotcha, pop. I'll fix up a nice bouquet." He turned and opened up the fridge again.

"No," I said. "I had in mind a plant. They last longer."

"No. Cut flowers. They're showier. Just leave it to me." He started pulling out flowers to go with the glads.

Now I'm not exactly a pushy man myself, but compared to Harold I am. There was no doubt in my mind, once I picked out a nice little plant, I'd get my way. So I looked over the half-curtain to decide which one I wanted. They were all so pretty, the hydrangias, the mums, the caladium. . . .

I looked closer. A couple were getting mighty puny. It was on

the tip of my tongue to say he was giving them too much water, when something stopped me. This something was a whole bunch of thoughts collected together at once, backing up to those little corsages he was always delivering. I moved away, and a vein in my neck started throbbing.

I could be mistaken. If I sounded off half cocked and made a fool of myself—maybe I'd wind up with a taste of fist. I looked over at Mr. Sanderson still answering those questions, his eyes feverish bright, and I thought about him going back to that lonesome room, crushing more beer cans while his hotel went downhill fast. I had to chance it.

While Harold was busy putting together the bouquet, I walked over to stand by Mr. Sanderson and Sid. Sid was asking about Larry, who tends bar in the basement.

"So this man is divorced and paying heavy child support," Sid was saying.

Mr. Sanderson agreed, and I put in, "I think Harold's watering those plants too much."

Mr. Sanderson looked at me blank-like while Sid went right on with his questions. When there was a pause for Mr. Sanderson to answer, I ploughed on.

"Anyway, I think it's too

much water—some of those bottom leaves are getting yellowish."

Mr. Sanderson dropped his hand, spread his fingers and made a gesture which told me plainly to get lost. "Excuse us, Angie," Sid said and he asked another question.

But I had in mind the secret word, and I wasn't going to stop until I'd worked it into the conversation. So before Mr. Sanderson could open his mouth to answer Sid's last question I said; "It could be overfertilization; you'd know about that, Sid."

"Overfertilization?" Sid said, turning to me.

"Yes. I forget what in fertilizer makes plants discolored."

"Well, there are several things," he said, lifting his pen to write on his pad as soon as I shut up. "Too much nitrogen for one."

"And for another—maybe too much copper?"

Sid's pen stayed right where it was, not touching the pad. He looked over at me. "What are you telling me, Angie?"

"That some of those bottom leaves are getting yellow. It may be he's just watering them too much. But that's not like Harold. Those plants are mostly show. His big investment is the cut flowers, and that's where he usually gives his attention. It's

just come to me that for the past few days he's been babying those plants, digging around them, pouring on water when they weren't thirsty."

While I was talking, Sid's eyebrows rose higher and higher. "And you think one way or another they might also be getting too much copper, is that it?" I nodded. He grinned his pearly grin and said, "Well then, old friend, let's go see."

In a bungalow that night, my Emma was atwitter with excitement. "And those pendants were really stuck down there in the pots?" she repeated for about the hundredth time.

"The police wouldn't get off our backs long enough for Harold to dig them out of there," I explained. "His problem was, he just couldn't help fussing over them."

She spent considerable time then fretting over the fate of the kids involved with drugs, wondering how their families were taking it, on and on, sighing over the kids, sighing over their families.

When finally she was drained there she turned to me with that gleam in her eyes I recognized only too well. "Hey, Angie, you know what you should do?" she began. But before she could tell me I had my pencil out and was wetting the point.

Watch for These Exciting New Stories by Women Authors:

THE APOSTLE MURDERS by CAROLE OTTIFY GRILLION

ALONE AT LAST by ANITA ZELMAN

THE EMPTY HOUSE by DANA LYON

DEJA VU by HELENE PHIPPS

A BODY NEVER KNOWS by RUTH WISSMANN

COMINGOR

by JAMES M. REASONER

When Earl Thompson died, the Texas town stood still. It took a shrewd young sheriff to prove the old man's death was no accident.

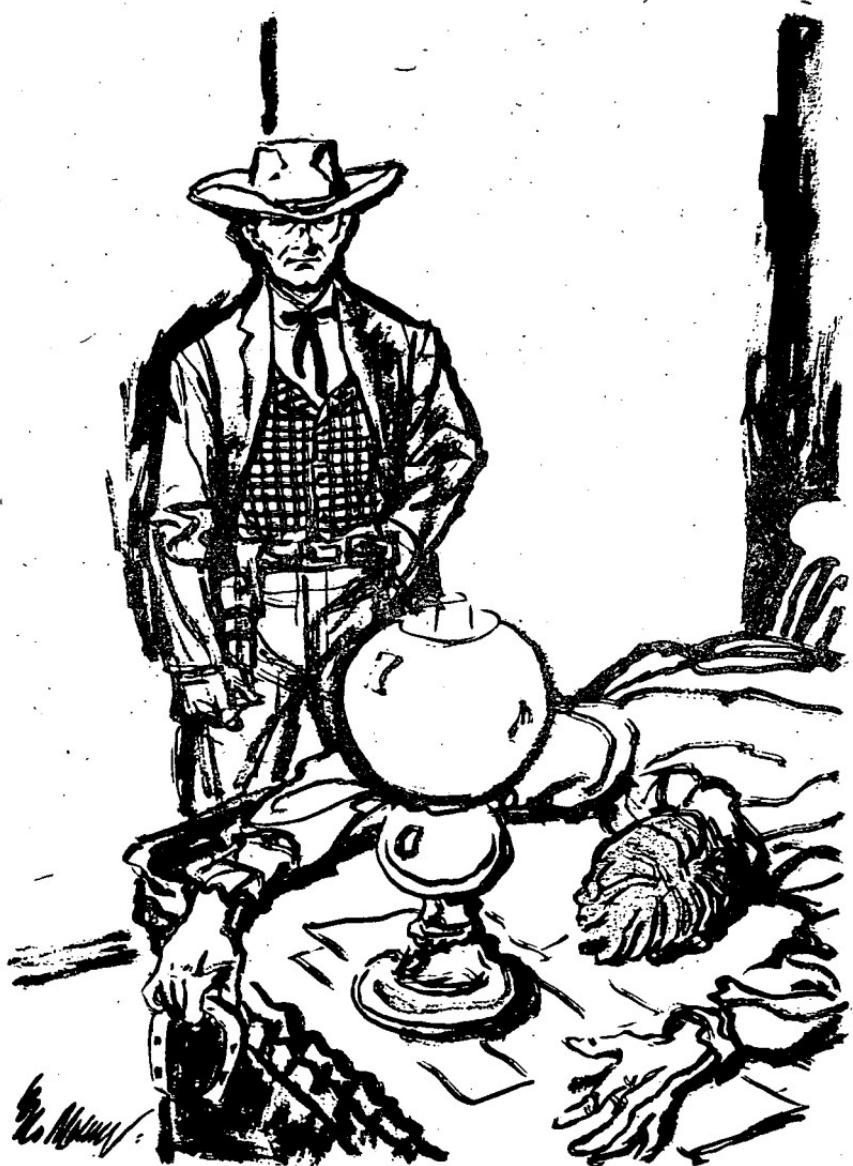
MOST OF THE TIME, Comingor is a sleepy little central Texas town dozing in the sun, surrounded by cattle ranches and peanut farms. The Comingor County Courthouse sits in the middle of the square, old and massive, made of limestone quarried further east.

In the southwest corner of the courthouse lawn is a huge old oak tree that has been there for centuries. Oldtimers say that a man was hung from it once, but that was before my time.

The majority of Comingor's business district is concentrated

on the four sides of the Square. We've got two department stores, two drugstores, a café, a hardware store, a furniture store, a variety store, a dentist, two barber shops and a beauty shop. No liquor stores—Comingor County is as dry as the cotton that grows in the northern part of the county.

The population of the town is right around 6500, and most of them are real peaceable folks. Which means things stay pretty quiet in the county sheriff's office in the basement of the Courthouse. We mostly sit around down there and take



life easy, enjoying the cool dimness.

When things get too boring, I get the other deputy, Floyd McCulloch, and we round up a couple of the old men that are always hanging around and get a game of dominoes going. Right after he became sheriff, Jeff kind of frowned on that, but I guess he learned there are some things not to be trifled with and dominoes is one of them, because he lets us play now.

I've been chief deputy for nearly twenty years and worked with five sheriffs, but Jeff Dameron is the best of the lot. He's a hometown boy, born and raised in Comingor. Like so many of the kids, he left town right after high school, going off to Austin and the University. While he was there, he studied criminology and psychology and stuff like that.

After he got his degree, he went to work for the Dallas police department. Jeff was always a real go-getter, and we all figured he'd be chief or police up there some day. But a year-and-a-half later, he came back to Comingor and moved back in with his papa.

When old Sheriff Terpko retired, Mayor Estes tried to get me to be sheriff, and I said no sir, he'd have to find somebody else. Well, Jeff ran

for the job and got it, and he's turned out to be a fine sheriff.

I asked him once how come he left Dallas to come back to Comingor, and he answered, "I guess Dallas was just too big for me, Fred, too much hustle and bustle. I like it better here where it's quiet."

He was right about it being quiet. Every so often, there's a wreck out on the highway or some old boys go over to Countyline and get drunk and feisty, but that's about all there is for the sheriff's office to handle. We hadn't had a killing in nearly seven years, since Mrs. Harvey Willcox took a butcher knife to Harvey over a pretty little barmaid from Countyline.

It was a hot Tuesday morning in June when that changed. I was by myself in the office, reading an old copy of *The Progressive Farmer* and listening to the empty crackle of the police radio.

It was nearly noon, and I had a notion to stroll over to the Texas Moon Café for a chicken-fried steak and a big glass of iced tea. But since I was holding down the fort, I decided I'd better wait until Jeff got back from upstairs, where he was attending a meeting of the Comingor County commissioners.

The telephone rang while I

was looking at a recipé for pecan pie. Regretfully, I put the magazine on the desk and picked up the receiver. "Sheriff's Office, Deputy Finch speaking," I answered.

"Is Sheriff Dameron there?" It was a woman's voice.

"Uh, no, ma'am, he's at the County Commissioners' meeting. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I'd rather speak to the sheriff personally, but if he's not available . . ." She paused for a second. "Very well. This is Mrs. Earl Hampton. I've just found my husband's body. I think he's dead."

Well, I liked to have dropped my teeth. Anything Earl Hampton did was big news in Comingor. His dying was the biggest news of all.

"You just stay right there," I gulped into the phone. "I'll find the sheriff and call Doc Yantis, and we'll be right out, hear?"

"Certainly, Deputy Finch," she sounded calm.

I slammed the phone down and took off up the stairs. Commissioners' Court is on the second floor of the courthouse, and I was huffing and blowing by the time I got there. The meeting must have just gotten over with, because Jeff was coming out of the double doors that led to the meeting room.

He looked surprised to see me

and asked, "What's the matter, Fred?", while I tried to catch up on my breathing.

Finally, I managed, "Earl Hampton's dead."

He stood there, eyes widening, as shocked as I had been. After a long minute, he said, "What happened?"

"Don't know. I just talked to Mrs. Hampton on the phone. She said she found the body."

"Have you called the doctor?"

"Not yet. I came to get you right off."

"Go start the car. I'll call the hospital and have Doc Yantis meet us at the Hampton place."

He ducked into an office to use the phone while I went down the stairs and outside. I cut across the grass to the blue-and-white sheriff's car that was parked by the curb. In less than two minutes, Jeff trotted out the door and across the grass, too. He slid into the passenger seat and I put the car in gear.

He sat quietly as we drove out of town and got onto the highway. The Hampton place was about five miles out, sitting several hundred yards off the road, on top of a hill. The drive gave me a chance to collect my thoughts on the Hamptons.

Earl Hampton was far and away the richest man in Comingor County. He and his

brother Roy had a big Hereford ranch, a hundred acres of peanuts, and a feed mill. They also owned the Chevrolet house in Comingor, but another fellow ran it for them.

Earl was what they call a patriarch. He ran things pretty tight, not only his businesses but his wife and his daughter and his little brother Roy, too. He had lived in Comingor County every day of his sixty-five years. He always struck me as a man who would walk bolt upright in a dust storm.

Roy was a different matter entirely. He wasn't really what you would call a black sheep, but in his younger days, he liked to drink a little bit and Earl was always riding herd on him, trying to calm him down.

At one time, Roy went to Fort Worth and tried to become a stockbroker, but he flubbed that and came home. Now he worked for Earl in various parts of the family business, mostly running the feed mill. He wasn't very good at it, but at least it kept him out of the house.

Earl's wife, Lorraine, was the closest thing to high society Comingor had. She was a pretty little woman who looked younger than she really was. I knew that she was every bit of fifty, because she and I went to Comingor High School together.

I had a crush on her then, but so did all the other boys.

Now she stayed out at the big Hampton house all the time, except for Sunday morning, when she attended the Methodist Church, and four times a year, when she went to Fort Worth to shop at Neiman-Marcus.

Melody Anne Hampton always went on those shopping trips with her mother, but church didn't interest her at all. In fact, Floyd McCulloch says she was up at Countyline one night when he went up there to break up a fight. As drunk as she could be, he claims.

It's a pity if it's true. You won't find any girls prettier than Melody Anne, eighteen years old with clear skin and long blond hair.

That was the Hampton family, and they had more money than any ten people in Comingor put together. Now Earl was dead, and I wondered what would happen because of it.

I WHEELED THE CAR into the gate in the chain link fence that bordered the highway. The road I turned onto was a blacktop that wandered up and down through the rolling, wooded hills. Every now and then, I could catch a glimpse of

the big house through the trees.

Jess hadn't said anything on the way out, just sitting and looking straight ahead. Glancing over at him as we approached the house, I could tell that he was holding a tight rein on his face. This was far and away the biggest thing that had happened since he became sheriff. I wondered if he had ever seen a dead man before.

I parked the car in the circle drive that ran in front of the house. I had never been there before, but I had seen the place from the road lots of times. It was big, two stories, made from fine wood that was always kept painted white on the outside. A covered porch ran all around it.

From the swing on the front porch, you could look out over the valley and see the source of the Hampton wealth spread out before you. It was a fine old house, and people say that Earl Hampton built all of it by himself, after he sold his first herd of Herefords to start his fortune.

We got out of the car and climbed the four steps to the porch. As we crossed it, the front door opened and Lorraine Hampton met us.

"Hello, Sheriff—Deputy Finch. Come in, please."

We stepped inside and found ourselves in a long hall that



ran through the middle of the house. Doors opened off of it into the big rooms.

"Won't you step in here and have a seat?"

Always the good hostess, Mrs. Hampton ushered us into the living room and sat us down on a plush sofa. She wore a simple blue dress that was a lot more expensive than it looked. Her attractive face was composed, and she seemed to be completely at ease. I wondered if she remembered fat Fred Finch, who used to gaze longingly at her in Miss Grissom's English class.

Jeff cleared his throat and said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Hampton." He looked uncomfortable. "If you could tell us what happened . . ." He let his voice trail off.

She seated herself in an

overstuffed armchair and clasped her hands in her lap. "Earl was working in his study this morning. I went in to see what he wanted for lunch about eleven-thirty. I found him slumped over his desk. Then, I called your office."

"You didn't call a doctor?"

"I knew he was dead. Earl had an extremely weak heart. It was just a matter of time until it finally gave out."

"He had had a heart attack before, hadn't he?"

"Two of them, the last one late last year. Dr. Yantis told him that he would have to slow down, leave the running of the business to others, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was happy only when he was making decisions."

Jeff leaned forward and said, "We'll have to see the body. You haven't moved it, have you?"

"No, Sheriff, I haven't moved him."

Jeff reddened slightly, but he got up and we followed her down the hall toward the back of the house. Mrs. Hampton stopped in front of a polished wooden door and opened it slowly. We slipped through, gingerly in the presence of death.

The room was lined with bookshelves, and the books on them looked well-used. A mas-

sive desk sat in the middle of the room. Earl Hampton sat behind the desk.

His big head was resting on top of it, his arms stretched out across it. There were few signs of violent death. The long white hair was mussed only slightly, and a piece of paper was crumpled under one hand. The biggest indication was the expression on the mustachioed face. It was a mixture of surprise and anger and hideous pain. Earl Hampton had not given up easily.

Jeff moved silently across the room and stood beside the body for a long moment. His eyes jumped from place to place, pausing sometimes to examine something more closely.

I heard the front door open again and, a second later, Doc Yantis came bustling into the room. "Where is he?" he asked in his loud, aggressive voice.

I pointed, and he went past me and stood on the other side of the desk from Jeff. He was old and thin and dried-up. "Okay to touch him?" he asked Jeff.

"Yes, just be careful. I don't want things disturbed too much."

"I've been the M.E. in this county for forty years, son, I know about evidence."

He raised Hampton's head and moved him back into an

upright position. While the doc examined the body, Jeff studied the titles of the books on the shelves behind the desk. He took one of them down and began to riffle through the pages.

A piece of paper that must have marked a place fell out and fluttered to the floor. Jeff stooped, picked it up, and put it back in the book, which he replaced on the shelves.

Doc Yantis stepped back from the body and announced, "He's dead, all right. Heart gave out, just like I told him it would if he kept up his usual pace."

Jeff turned back around and said, "Thank you, doctor. It's natural causes, then?"

"Undoubtedly. What did you think it was?"

"I didn't know. That's why I asked."

DOC SNORTED AND left the room. I asked Jeff, "You want me to get the ambulance boys in here to take him away?"

"Not just yet." He leaned over the body and tilted the head forward. For at least two minutes, he peered intently at the back of Earl Hampton's head. Then he straightened up and said, "You stay here and watch the body, Fred. I'm going to talk to Mrs. Hampton."

Jeff had never cut a very impressive figure in his khaki

uniform, but he seemed to walk a little straighter as he left the room.

I pulled up a chair and sat down to wait. There was a window in one wall, and I could see some cattle grazing in a field. It was a pretty view.

Jeff came back in a few minutes with one of the ambulance boys. He told me, "I want you with me, Fred. Bert here will watch the body." To Bert, he said, "Don't let anybody disturb it, including you."

I thought his voice was a little sharper than usual, but I put it down to nerves. This was a big thing for a new young sheriff.

We went across the hall and entered the large dining room. Mrs. Hampton was sitting at the mahogany table and Doc Yantis was staring out the French windows. He turned around when we came in and said, "What's the matter, Sheriff? Why can't we get on with our business?"

Soothingly, Jeff replied, "In a little bit, doctor. There are a few things I have to do first. Anytime someone dies under mysterious circumstances, there has to be an investigation. You know that."

"Mysterious circumstances? What mysterious circumstances? The man had a weak heart and it gave out on him."

"That's what it looks like, all right."

Mrs. Hampton said, "What exactly do you mean, Sheriff?"

Jeff sat down across the table from her. "I don't know, Mrs. Hampton. Maybe nothing. Have you notified your brother-in-law?"

"I called him at the mill and told him to come home immediately. I didn't tell him why."

"Does your daughter know?"

"Yes. I told her while you were in the study. She went to her room upstairs."

"She was upset?"

"Moderately. We are not a close family."

You could say that again, I thought. Her eyes were as dry as could be.

"I suppose your brother-in-law is on his way now?" Jeff asked.

"He should be arriving shortly."

"I'll want to talk to all of you, your daughter included, but while we wait for your brother-in-law, there are a few questions I'd like to ask you."

She sat silently, her features still, as Jeff looked at her closely. When she said nothing, he went on, "Was your husband working in his study all morning?"

"Yes. He got up at seven-thirty as he always does, had

his breakfast and went right to work."

"Who saw him this morning?"

"Why, all of us, I suppose. Lucinda took him his breakfast—"

"Who's Lucinda?" Jeff broke in.

"The cook and maid and housekeeper. She's very good. At any rate, she took him his breakfast, which he ate in the study. I went in to see him about eight-thirty and took the tray back to the kitchen."

"That was the last time you saw your husband alive?"

"Yes." For a moment, some emotion threatened to creep onto her face, but she forced it off.

"Who else saw him?"

"Roy was in early, to talk over something about the mill."

"You don't know what they discussed?"

"I stopped a long time ago trying to keep up with Earl's business, Sheriff. After Roy was in, Reese spoke to Earl briefly."

"Reese?"

"The foreman—the man in charge of the Herefords—the man in charge of the entire ranch operation, for that matter. My husband has had to turn over the physical duties to subordinates, even though he didn't like it."

Didn't seem to help his condi-

tion much, either, I thought. A bad heart's a tricky thing, though.

"And your daughter?"

"Melody put her head in the door long enough to say good morning, that's all."

"So five people saw your husband this morning. Lucinda, Reese, Roy Hampton, your daughter and yourself. Which one saw him last?"

"Melody, I suppose. She spoke to him right after she got up, around ten o'clock."

Just then, the front door banged open and we heard boots stomping down the hall. The dining room door opened and Roy Hampton stepped into the room, oozing mad.

"Dammit, Lorraine, what is it you want?"

Roy Hampton had been red-faced all his life. He had too much belly and not enough hair. He still drank, and he resented his successful older brother.

Then he caught sight of Jeff and Doc and me, and he asked in his loud voice, "What's going on here?"

Mrs. Hampton answered him quietly. "Earl passed away this morning, Roy."

"Huh? Earl's dead?" That news took him down a notch. "But I just saw him a few hours ago. What happened?"

"His heart."

Roy rubbed his jaw. "Yeah. Wow! Old Earl's gone." He became aware of us again. "What are *they* doing here?"

"I called the sheriff when I found the body. He's conducting an investigation."

Roy turned to Jeff. "What for? Everybody knows Earl had a bum heart."

"Just trying to keep things straight legally, Mr. Hampton," Jeff answered. "These things have to be looked into. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Well—I guess not."

"What time did you see your brother this morning?"

"I went into the study a little before nine, I guess, then I left for the mill at nine-fifteen."

"What did you discuss?"

"I don't see where that's any of your business!"

Mrs. Hampton said, "Please, Roy. Cooperate and let's get this over with."

He glowered for a minute, finally said, "We just talked about some grain shipments. Regular business talk. I did what he told me to, been setting them up all morning at the mill."

Jeff nodded and said, "Thank you, Mr. Hampton. This is all just routine, you know."

"Damned silly if you ask me."

Jeff ignored his remark and said to Mrs. Hampton, "I'd like

to talk to your daughter now, please."

"I suppose you have to?" She sighed.

"Yes, ma'am, I think it would be best."

"I'll get her."

while she went upstairs to fetch Melody Anne, the rest of us sat in uncomfortable silence. Roy glared at Jeff, but Jeff had a far-off look on his face and didn't seem to be aware of it.

We stood up when Mrs. Hampton led Melody Anne into the room. She was dressed in jeans and a halter, showing a lot of tanned skin. Like her mother, she had her face under control, but at least her eyes were red.

"Miss Hampton," Jeff began, "I'm sorry. I hate to bother you at a time like this, but could answer a few questions for me?"

Her answer came in a low voice. "I'll try, Sheriff."

"Do you remember what time it was when you saw your father?"

"It—it was a few minutes after ten. I just said, 'Hi,' to him."

"Was he alone at the time?"

"Yes. He was working on some papers. He had them spread out on the desk."

"And you didn't see him after that?"

"No."

"Where have you been since then?"

"Upstairs, in my room."

I was getting curious about what Jeff had in mind. I didn't see why we didn't just load up the body and leave these folks alone.

"All right, Miss Hampton. Thank you very much."

Jeff turned back to Mrs. Hampton and asked, "I'll need to talk to Reese, too. Do you know where we could find him right now?"

Roy answered for her. "He's down at the loading pens. We've got some steers going out this morning."

"Fred, go see if you can find him, okay? Bring him back here, but don't tell him why."

I was pretty comfortable, but I got up anyway and said, "Which way do I go?"

"Out the back door and over the second hill," Mrs. Hampton said.

As I trudged out, mourning that chicken-fried steak I had missed out on, I heard Jeff say, "I'll talk to Lucinda now, while we're waiting."

I let myself out the back door and walked through the yard, up a hill, through a brushy hollow and up another hill. I could hear cattle and the sound of men shouting. A dust cloud rose on the other side of the hill.

WHEN I REACHED the top of the rise, I could see the pens below me, filled with milling cattle. Just beyond were the train tracks, with a loading chute next to them. A freight was stopped on the tracks, and ranch hands were poking steers up the chute and into a cattle car.

I ambled up to one of the hands and said above the noise, "Looking for Reese! He around?"

"See that ol' boy with the feather in his hat?" he answered, pointing. "That there's Reese."

I touched my hat brim and went over to the fellow with the bluejay feather stuck in his hatband. He was a tall well-built man, with sweat and dust streaking his face. A cattle prod hung limply in his hand.

I asked, "You Reese?"

He looked at me with a wary expression. "Yeah. What's the trouble?"

"Beats me. I'm just a deputy. Sheriff Dameron wants to see you up at the house."

"Right away?"

"Soon as possible."

"All right. Let me get this critter loaded."

He swung up on the side of the chute and poked a balky steer with the prod. The electric jolt drove it on into the car. Reese hopped back down into

the dust and fell in beside me as I walked back to the house.

"You got any idea what this is about?" he asked.

"Sheriff sent me to fetch you," I replied. Reese didn't say anything more.

When we got back to the dining room, he took his hat off before we went in. Jeff was by the windows, talking in a low tone with Doc Yantis. Roy and Lorraine Hampton were there, but Melody had evidently gone upstairs again. I didn't see the servant, Lucinda, anywhere, so I supposed Jeff had finished with her.

Jeff saw us come in and broke off his conversation with the doc. He walked over to us and said, "Mr. Reese, I'm Sheriff Dameron. I'm afraid I have some bad news."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"Earl Hampton died this morning."

Reese's jaw sagged. "The boss . . . dead? What happened?"

"Doctor Yantis says he had a heart attack. You knew he had a weak heart?"

"Sure, everybody knew that. But the old man seemed indestructable."

That didn't strike me as a very nice way to refer to a man with his widow in the room, but she didn't seem to mind.

"You spoke to him this morning, I believe?"

"Yeah, I just stuck my head in the door for a minute. I told him about the cattle we were shipping today."

"What time was that, do you remember?"

"I guess it was about nine-thirty."

"You didn't see him after that?"

"No, I started getting the cattle on board the train."

"Thank you, Mr. Reese. Would you mind waiting here a few minutes? Then maybe we can let you get back to your charges. Fred, would you stay here with these folks for a bit?"

I nodded and sat down at the table while Jeff and Doc Yantis went out into the hall. They were gone almost ten minutes before they came back.

"Fred, would you go get Lucinda, please?" Jeff asked. "I imagine you'll find her in the kitchen."

Mrs. Hampton started to tell me where it was as I got up, but I told her, "Don't worry, ma'am, I can find it."

THE LOVELY AROMA of fresh-baked bread was the plainest sort of trail for me. I found Lucinda taking it out of the oven. She was an attractive little Mexican woman, and I bet she made a mean burrito. I led her back to the dining room, assuring her that I didn't have

the slightest idea what was going on.

Jeff smiled at her kindly and said, "There's two more things I'd like to ask you, Lucinda. Have you been in the kitchen all morning?"

"Yes, I have been baking bread. That takes time."

"I know. You clean the house as well as cook, don't you, Lucinda?"

"Do I clean? This house could not exist without me! Yes, I clean."

"You even clean Mr. Hampton's study?"

"Especially Mr. Hampton's study. He was a neat man, he did not like a mess."

"When was the last time you cleaned it?"

"Yesterday evening, after Mr. Hampton went to bed."

"You cleaned it thoroughly?"
She drew herself up to her full height of five feet and declared, "Sheriff, when I clean a room, it is *clean*."

Mrs. Hampton said, "Sheriff, we've been more than cooperative in this matter. But what is the point in all these questions? My husband had a heart attack and died. That may be blunt, but it's the truth of the matter."

There was a light in Jeff's eyes that I had never seen there before as he said, "But is it the *truth*, Mrs. Hampton?"

Her voice got hard. "What do you mean by that?"

"Where have you been all morning, Mrs. Hampton?"

Roy Hampton came to his feet and blustered, "What the hell do you mean by that, Dameron?"

Doc Yantis cut in with "If I were you, I'd sit down and be quiet, Roy. You really should answer the question, Mrs. Hampton."

I could tell that she was mad, but she stayed calm and replied, "I was upstairs in my room, Sheriff. Now I really think you should tell us what the purpose of all this is. Do you think there's more to Earl's death than a heart attack?"

"Yes, ma'am," Jeff answered. "Your husband was murdered."

I thought Jeff had taken leave of his senses. So did everyone else in the room except Doc Yantis, who seemed to have come over to his side since their jaunt down the hall.

Roy Hampton, spacing his words slowly, said, "That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard."

Mrs. Hampton sat quietly, disbelieving. Lucinda was muttering in Spanish and Reese was fiddling with his hat.

Jeff looked sad and excited at the same time. He said into the silence, "Earl Hampton had a heart attack, all right, and he

died from it. But that heart attack was induced and, under the law, the person who induced it is guilty of murder."

He sat down and put his hands on the table, completely at ease: Boy, I sure wasn't. Murder talk makes me jumpy.

"While Doctor Yantis was examining the body, I noticed something on the floor." I remembered him stooping to pick up the bookmark. Now he took his handkerchief out of his pocket and unfolded it carefully. Nestled in the center of it was a small dark lump. I knew what it was before he said anything.

"I found this piece of manure behind Earl Hampton's chair. Lucinda cleaned the room last night. It got there somehow this morning."

I still wasn't too sure about things, but I felt I ought to move over in front of the door, quietlike. I did.

"Upon closer examination of Mr. Hampton's body, I found a mark on the back of his neck, just above the hairline. The doctor agrees with me that it's a burn mark."

Everybody was interested now, hanging on Jeff's every word.

"Some sort of shock could have easily brought on Mr. Hampton's heart attack. Everyone knew of his condition.

We know someone tracked manure behind his chair. Mrs. Hampton, Miss Hampton, and Lucinda have been indoors all morning. Roy Hampton and Reese have been outdoors. But Roy Hampton has been at the mill all morning and can presumably prove it."

"*The cattle prod!*" I yelled, as the light dawned. Reese glanced at me, and I knew Jeff was right all the way from the meanness in his eyes.

"That's right, Fred, the cattle prod. I figured it had to be something like that. It'll give off at least a thousand volts, won't it, Reese? And that's more than enough to finish the job."

"More than enough," Doc Yantis echoed.

"What're you saying, Sheriff? You saying I killed the boss?" Reese asked.

"Yes, Mr. Reese. I'm not sure why, but we'll find out. You came back later this morning, slipping away from the confusion of the loading pens. You talked with Mr. Hampton, then you stepped behind him and jolted him with a cattle prod. I don't know how many times, but once would have probably been enough."

Lucinda backed away from Reese in fear. Roy Hampton looked flabbergasted, and an

expression of contempt was on Lorraine's face as she looked at Reese.

Reese said, "This is stupid. I got work to do." He turned to go out the door and found me in his way. I planted my feet.

Jeff said, "Don't try it, Mr. Reese. You might take Fred, although I doubt it, but there's no way you could take both of us."

Reese considered for a minute, then put his hat on and disgustedly said a word that I thought was entirely appropriate.

Well, we took him into custody. Jeff got an accountant to go over the ranch's books and we found out that Reese had been stealing the old man blind. Hampton had just tumbled onto that fact and, when Reese saw those certain papers on the desk that morning, he knew his hand was about to be called.

He came back, just like Jeff said, and tried to save his own skin by killing Hampton. He's in Huntsville now, and the Hamptons are richer than ever. I wonder if they even miss the old man.

I know one thing for sure. Jeff Dameron is the best sheriff Comingor County has ever had.

And I've been chief deputy for a long time.

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AUGUST, 1977

BAPTISM OF BLOOD

by

HERBERT HARRIS

THERE WERE ONLY two exits from the warehouse, and Screwy realized, with a sick emptiness in his stomach, that it was now impossible to make his escape from either of them.

The police already had the place covered, back and front, so it was no use making a bolt for it.

118



Screwy had never had a bright idea in his life—except one that turned out to be not so brilliant as it worked out.

And yet if he waited here, while they made their painstaking search, from room to room, poking into every nook and cranny, they must inevitably find him in the long run.

Trapped. It was almost ludicrous. Fancy getting a stretch in the stir right at the outset of your career, getting

picked up by the blueboys on your maiden job!

It was something he would never live down. Even now, he could almost hear Big Charlie saying the scathing words . . .

"You're certainly well named, Screwy. Batty as they come, that's what you are, son. A flaming nit." And they'd all laugh.

He had always wished his named hadn't been Driver. Some bright wag had called him 'Screw' Driver, and in no time at all the nickname had become Screwy.

Well, maybe he *was* a bit green. Thoughtless. Too apt to put his foot in it. But then he hadn't had the experience of blokes like Big Charlie, and Whitey, and The Greek.

Whitey and The Greek hadn't wanted him to become a member of the mob at all. Big Charlie hadn't been all that keen either, but Big Charlie had been a bosom chum of Screwy's father and had sort of kept an eye on the boy since Duggy Driver had been knifed by a fellow-prisoner in Dartmoor and snuffed it.

"I know you aren't too bright," Big Charlie had said paternally, "but I'm going to give you a chance—your baptism of blood, as you might say. We're taking you on a job, son, and you'd better keep your

flaming wits about you, that's all!"

Whitey and The Greek had pulled sour faces, but Big Charlie said: "Look, this is a cushy job—right on top of our headquarters at Turk's Wharf. Nobody's going to look in *that* old ruin. Nothing's going to happen."

Screwy had wanted to show them that he was okay, but it hadn't worked out that way. He had bombed, just as Whitey and the Greek had said he would.

He had been told—twice, so that it could sink into his thick head—what to do in the case of a sudden emergency. The prearranged escape-hole, all nicely worked out.

But Screwy, who had been acting as lookout, right away from the main party, just forgot what they had told him. He had clearly heard Big Charlie yell "*Cops!*" and the wild scamper of feet as the gang had made their frantic bolt for the safe way out. Then, like the stupid burk he was, he ran in the wrong direction and lost his way in the maze of passages.

Of course, the others had got clear. They were safe inside Turk's Wharf by now, which was only just up the road. But Screwy was still here. And the cops were swarming around like ants, outside and inside, so now he'd never get out. They

just had to find him sooner or later . . .

Unless . . . unless he could think of something . . .

He would be okay if he could get out. Big Charlie and Whitey and The Greek would be waiting for him at Turk's Wharf, only a few hundred yards away.

It was a bit comic really, Screwy thought. All these cops stooging around the deserted warehouse—well, deserted except for Screwy—and just a little way up the road was the gang's new headquarters, with three of the toughest, most experienced crooks in the country just sitting there and smiling and telling themselves the fuzz didn't have a clue about what was actually going on at Turk's Wharf.

But maybe they were cursing under their breath, Screwy thought, thinking it was a cinch he'd get picked up. And they'd be worried, wondering if he was going to blow the gaff about Turk's Wharf. Well, he wouldn't . . . never. They could torture him if they liked, but he'd never rat on his mates.

He stood now in a narrow aisle between two of the long rows of steel shelving. The shelving was loaded with cartons waiting for dispatch, so Screwy was well shielded from view.

He stood with his back pressed hard against the cartons, very still, listening alertly. Sweat streamed down his thin, bony face. His heart thudded like a pile-driver. His eyes darted back and forth with fear and sharp cunning.

Oh, God, he didn't want to land in stir . . . not yet. Okay, so think of something . . . think hard . . . think, think, think . . .

Suddenly, no more than 20 or 30 feet away, a single pencil of light appeared, swinging in a slowly inscribed arc. Screwy's eyes were fastened on the operating end of the thin beam.

One of the patrol-car policemen had appeared at the top of a small flight of steps. He stood there for a full minute, shining his torch and maybe looking for a light switch. Apparently he didn't see Screwy.

The policeman came down the steps and paused again, straining his eyes and ears. Screwy held his breath until he thought his lungs would burst. He remained as still as a statue.

Now, in his desperation, just as if some kindly providence were suddenly on his side, Screwy had an idea. A dazzling flash of inspiration which would enable him to get out of the building and pass unnoticed, even though the cops actually looked at him . . .

This sudden timely wheeze was pretty wonderful, he reckoned. Big Charlie might even congratulate him and say: "You're a good boy after all, Screwy. You used your loaf. I'm proud of you, kid."

The heavy wrench from the van the mob used was still in the deep, thigh pocket of his jeans. He closed his fingers tightly round it and waited for the cop to move within range.

In the silent echoing warehouse, each measured step taken by the prowl-cop was like a clap of thunder. Like a delayed torture, the steps came nearer, nearer . . .

Screwy's heartbeats were quickening. His whole body trembled. The salt sweat was running into his eyes, blinding him. As the cop came level with the end of the aisle, Screwy braced himself, waited two seconds for the policeman to move on, then moved out quickly and silently. He brought the spanner down in one swift, decisive stroke.

He waited while the policeman twisted in a slow turn and crumpled like a collapsing chimney-stack. Then he quickly dragged the senseless form into the aisle between the shelves.

Screwy could hear other policemen in other parts of the warehouse, their clattering footsteps, an occasional word of

command, a laugh or two. A tug hooted on the nearby river. He was conscious of every sound, his nerves as taut as violin strings. It was necessary to work calmly and with speed.

He peeled off his jeans and the motorcyclist's black leather jacket he always wore. And now, working with a surer confidence, he began to strip the clothes from the unconscious policeman, making as little noise as possible.

It took only a few minutes to complete the operation. And when at last Screwy emerged cautiously from the aisle between the shelves, he was 'one of them', to look at anyway, dressed now in the uniform, complete with peaked cap, of the police car patrolman.

He picked up the flashlight and moved towards the nearest general exit.

In one of the long passages on the way out of the main building he passed another policeman. The latter called cheerfully: "Found anything interesting?"

"Not a flipping thing!" Screwy called back, somehow making his voice sound natural. He hurried on, and nobody stopped him.

Outside the building, he walked along with unhurried assurance, hoping he looked businesslike. He passed one of

the drivers sitting at the wheel of a waiting patrol-car. Its headlights flooded him for a moment, and Screwy had a spasm of panic.

"Another wild goose chase?" the driver asked, almost jocundly.

"Seems like it!" Screwy answered and went on his way. The uniform felt like a sack on him, but nobody had noticed anything amiss.

Within a few minutes he was off the warehouse premises. He had run the gauntlet! Big Charlie would be pleased. Hell, they should give him a medal for this!

He began to run as he got near Turk's Wharf, eager to join the rest of the mob.

This time he knew the entrance all right. He had remembered. Things were going okay at last.

It was The Greek who shouted out. Just the one scared and astonished word, like a scream—"Cop!"

And it was Whitey who whipped out the gun. The trigger-happy Whitey, who liked to shoot first and ask questions afterwards.

"No!" Screwy called. "Don't shoot!" But they didn't listen to his frantic cry.

"Let him have it," Big Charlie said grimly.

And Whitey fired. Accurately. So Screwy died—on his first job—in the uniform of a policeman.

READ: In the September issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

A LADY TO KILL

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

In keeping with an issue whose non-lead stories are entirely crafted by the not-so-gentler sex, Brett Halliday has built his forthcoming novel about an amazing woman, a cosmetics czarina whose mental candlepower could conceivably have put Einstein's to shame. The big problem Shayne must resolve is that of Orla Rubens' innocence. Is Orla guilty of international skulduggery on an imperial scale, or is she being duped by her confederates while the corpses drop



QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD

by KATHLEEN HERSHY

Julie-Rose looked to be riding the crest of the wave—but the undertoe proved to be treacherous.

SHERIFF HICKS CRUISED the neighborhood . . . nice, quiet, not much happening. He saw the ladies going up Diane Wilson's walk. They had coffee together often he thought to himself and smiled. He drove around the corner to Curt Wilson's gas station and pulled in next to Roscoe Osgood's black pickup truck. Curt came to the

concrete island between the pumps and tried to service both cars and still listen to Roscoe's bragging. Sheriff Hicks could not help overhearing.

"That little wife of mine has really outdone herself this time" boasted Roscoe. "Got herself a microwave oven. Bakes potatoes in ten minutes flat. Don't know how she manages

so well on what I make. I sure am lucky."

"Yeah, you're one lucky guy," Curt agreed, pushing the charge card back through the open window of his neighbor's truck.

"You can say that again." Roscoe nodded his pleasure, signing the ticket. Then Roscoe revved up the old engine and pulled out just before Sheriff Hicks himself left to answer a radio call.

Standing alone in his service station, Curt Wilson allowed himself to laugh aloud at the ignorance of that old fool; Roscoe. His neighbor was lucky, but not for the reasons he boasted. Roscoe's wife, Julie-Rose, was a winner all right, but it was because she had the most fantastic body he had ever seen.

Curt knew he wasn't the only man in their neighborhood who knew Julie-Rose's good points. He smiled again. He knew how Roscoe's wife got that microwave oven and a lot of other things, too, like the skin tight, red silk dress and the bottle of real Chanel Number Five and the money for the new living room couch.

Curt went back inside his gas station and, with an unusual display of conscience, telephoned the florist to order a dozen long stemmed red roses

to be delivered to his wife, Diane.

The roses arrived while Diane was entertaining two neighbor ladies over coffee and homemade bundt cake.

"The roses are beautiful," Sharon said.

"They really are, Diane," Marily agreed.

But the three women looked at the bouquet dolefully. Diane did not bother to read the card. She had pricked her thumb and excused herself to take care of her injury. She hoped her companions did not realize it was deliberate.

She knew they were watching her curiously. She had to get out of that room. The blood coursed down into her palm. It stung but not like the sting of Curt's personal betrayal of her. She longed to confront him but was afraid she might lose him.

Woman's liberation had come too late for Diane. She had given up an art scholarship to marry Curt. Her parents had protested in vain. She was their only child, but eventually they had come to love Curt almost as much as she did. In the end, her parents had given them the gas station when her father retired.

Diane had given Curt everything he wanted from her all these years. She pushed her hair from her brow. Not a grey

hair yet. She kept herself up, took pains to stay as chic as she was able, between having babies and dieting. Maybe she should have an affair.

The thought amused her, then set her temper flaring. Curt was the only man she wanted. She would do whatever was necessary to keep him. Her wave of self-pity over, she started back to join her guests, Marilyn and Sharon.

Marilyn was the type of woman who cleaned the house over and over from Monday until Friday. Her greatest excitement was to watch the soap operas every afternoon and sometimes cry over a jilted woman or a spoiled romance. She cried more and more lately. She felt near to tears now.

Sharon was pregnant and the thought of her bulging figure made her feel a little off-balance about everything. A lack of self-confidence was unusual for Sharon. She had been in several of the local playhouse productions and kept a scrapbook of clippings and black and white photographs of her in every role she had played.

But now that Sharon was housebound, she was forced to watch her husband's indiscretion and she did not like what she saw. She knew it would only take her a little while to

think up a suitable solution to their mutual problem.

"If July-Rose says one more thing about that microwave oven, I'm going to wrap it around her neck," Diane exploded as she entered the living room. "As if we didn't know where she gets her money!"

"We've just got to do something about that woman," Sharon said, "and I think I have an idea."

The cause of their concern was busy behind the drawn curtains in the house next door. Julie-Rose, youngest wife on the block, married to the oldest man on the block, was feeling sexier than ever at that moment. She rubbed the front of her red, silk dress with her palms. She compared the polish on her nails to the shade of red in the dress and smiled. One more turn before the long mirror and she was satisfied.

The coffee klatch was still going on but she had left early to hem the new dress. She only went to Diane's this morning to tell them about her new microwave oven. While next door, she had borrowed a stamp, had one cup of coffee and no dessert. She had no intention of losing her figure. It was her best source of income.

She was glad Roscoe said he did not want a baby. She certainly did not, even after Dr.

Woods' alarming news. He was probably mistaken. She felt perfectly well. She was losing weight, not gaining it, and that pleased her more than it worried her. She did not want a baby. Pregnancies ruined a woman's figure. She laughed inside herself. Didn't those stupid women next door know coffee-cake was going to make their figures even more dumpy?

Then Julie-Rose sighed at the shadows under her yes. She covered her hair-do with a scarf and lay down for her overdue nap.

SIX WEEKS LATER, Julie-Rose was dead.

Roscoe and all the men in the neighborhood were shocked. The three husbands shook their heads at each other in disbelief. They had thought of Roscoe's wife as flesh, all right, but until she was gone they had never thought of her as "flesh and blood" with thoughts and feelings like their own wives. Julie-Rose had been different. Now that she was dead they felt uneasy about the whole thing.

The women took their former companion's death with a strange stunned wariness. They began to sit together long hours in the morning, sometimes into the afternoon until the school-age children came home.

Curt was the one most puzzled by their reaction. He came home for lunches since his gas station was close by. He had not thought the women had liked Julie-Rose that much. If they had known what had gone on, they would have hated her. Average housewives and mothers, good active P. T. A. members, leaders of this drive or that community project. Typical, reliable women—all too typical to understand a little extra-marital affair, Curt thought.

"Good-bye ladies" he called as he slammed the screen door on his way back to work.

"God, I'm glad he's gone!" Sharon sighed in relief.

"We never meant to kill her." Diane wailed.

"Well, it looks like we got away with it," said Marilyn. "I can't say I don't feel just awful about it." She started to get a tear in her eye. "Especially the way poor Roscoe's grieving himself to death over losing her."

"He isn't starving." Sharon smiled ruefully. "He hasn't missed a hot meal since she passed away—thanks to the three of us."

"We could just call Sheriff Hicks over here and confess the whole thing." Diane suggested.

"Like, er—Sheriff Hicks, we confess we killed Julie-Rose

Osgood because she was making out with all three of our husbands." Sharon said in her best stage voice. "Then he'd have to say, 'Okay, ladies, how'd you do it?' Then we'd tell him and he'd arrest all three of us. What else could he do?"

"How could he arrest all three of us when we don't even know which one of us really killed her?" Marilyn asked. "It was a damn clever trick if she hadn't up and died."

"She wasn't *supposed* to die. Just get a little sick and maybe start to lose her looks a bit." Diane reminded them.

"I *had* hoped her bleached hair would all fall out." Sharon spoke wistfully.

"It was a good idea, all the same," said Diane. "Harold warned you that spray poison for the garden would kill the insects but that it might make the dog and cat sick. It should have worked the way we planned."

"You don't suppose she licked all those stamps at once, do you?" Marilyn asked, sitting up suddenly.

"No, when she borrowed one from me, week before last, she licked it right in my living room and put the envelope in my mail box to be picked up." Diane said.

"The way we coated the back of that sheet of stamps and

divided it three ways should have given her such a tiny bit when she came to borrow them that she should have gotten a little sick on and off, turned pale maybe. It just wasn't premeditated murder. We just hated her. God, the day she borrowed the stamp, she borrowed a can of tuna for Roscoe's supper, too." Diane sighed.

"How do you fix tuna in a microwave?" Marilyn asked.

"That's beside the point," said Diane. "We knew what a tightwad she was. Why, those contests she entered, she entered with our postage stamps."

"And our coupons," Sharon reminded them.

"She told Roscoe that's where she made her money. That and careful planning on the groceries. Ha!" Marilyn said.

"Since we never meant her to die, I don't think we should confess," Sharon decided. "If we *do* confess, who will look after our kids? Collectively, we're five, and I'm expecting in June."

"I agree with Sharon," said Marilyn. "Let's let it be. Of course, we can never tell anyone. Our husbands must never catch on that we knew about their evenings out. Why confess? We can't bring her back!"

"I guess not. But I'll never get

over what's happened. Maybe I could get Curt to move to a new neighborhood," Diane said.

"Oh, no, Diane." Sharon and Marilyn spoke together.

Sharon added "The children would miss each other so much. And we'd never get to coffee klatch like we do now. Besides we did make that pact together the day Julie-Rose went to the hospital that, if anything happened, we'd all take care of poor old Roscoe."

Next door 'poor old Roscoe' needed a shave. He pondered which of the neighbor ladies would invite him for a hot supper tonight. Julie-Rose had been a lousy bitch all along and he knew it, but he had loved her. He hadn't meant that the slow acting poison he'd been slipping in her food should kill her. Just slow her down.

He wondered if Dr. Woods knew anything from the autopsy. He'd have to give his consent—what other choice did he have? He almost wished Sheriff Hicks would stop cruising the neighborhood and take him to jail. Anything was better than this.

SHERIFF HICKS CRUISED the neighborhood again. Nice, quiet, not much happening—except that now Julie-Rose was dead. He'd been the first to arrive when the call came that

ordinary knocking couldn't get Mrs. Osgood to the door. Her corpse had not been beautiful.

Hicks drove up and down the block with the paper in his uniform pocket. He could not decide what to do. He had read the autopsy report—three types of poison ingested. He knew what they had done and why. He had not been immune to Julie-Rose's attractions himself, but he was happily wedded to his job. Except for tonight. He had a decision to make. But how do you punish a neighborhood?

He thought he had seen everything in his fifteen years of service until this had happened. As he cruised the neighborhood, struggling to make his decision, the night dragged on and he watched the lights flash on and off up and down the restless row of houses. Their inmates could not sleep.

Suddenly, he smiled. He stopped under the street light and reread the letter he had received in his mail that noon.

It had come just after Dr. Woods told him the facts of Julie-Rose's terminal illness and ruled her death as caused by "natural causes". Her letter to Dr. Woods had confirmed his verdict. With an odd smile, Hicks slowly tore Julie-Rose's suicide note into smaller and smaller pieces.

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